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THE PILGRIM CHURCH

Jesus Saviour
Percy C. Ainsworth

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THE PILGRIM CHURCH

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY THE

REV. PERCY C. AINSWORTH

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FOREWORD

THE simple facts of Percy Clough Ainsworth's quiet life may soon be written: the hidden springs of his influence and charm it would take long to trace. He was born at Woodbridge in Suffolk in 1873. His father, the Rev. William Ainsworth, was a Wesleyan minister, honoured and successful in his calling, of great force of character, and heroically patient under much physical suffering. Genius, like knighthood, does not pass by earthly inheritance, yet the Spirit who brings the gift loves to visit the home of puritan grace and strength. Percy Ainsworth received a heritage of fortitude from both his parents.

The home was singularly sunny, with an eager intellectual atmosphere. Brothers and sisters vied with one another in fresh thought and humour: the good fruits of the mind were never frost-bitten. Percy early learned to value aright his gifts, and this training of encouragement helps to explain his modest self-reliance and secret faithfulness in following the bent of his original powers. His education was obtained chiefly at Batley Grammar School and Lincoln

Grammar School. From the latter he matriculated at London University, and entered Didsbury College in 1893 to prepare for the Wesleyan ministry.

He came to college with a good equipment of school knowledge and a habit of conscientious work, ready for the impulse which would make him a vigorous and independent thinker. Dr. R. Waddy Moss, whose knowledge of the students and interest in them never failed, writes of him as follows: 'As a student he read widely and profitably, thereby attaining a good working knowledge of the best English classics. He was attracted by good style and fond of the poets and essayists, though by no means neglectful of the novelty and intrinsic value of thought that had an ethical bearing. It can hardly be said that he gave promise of the ripeness in the pulpit which in a very few years' time he began to exhibit. He was a somewhat shy, self-conscious man, who gradually grew into the easy mastery of himself and his conditions. Of his character and influence, nothing less than the highest should be said. His life at college provided exactly the kind of discipline he needed at that time; and he left it with a wider outlook and with enforced convictions, and soon proved himself to be a great gift of God to our Church.' Those closely-packed sentences are full of insight and truth.

Foreword

Percy Ainsworth's disposition was non-aggressive, influencing by attraction, not dominating by force. There was even a touch of reserve about him in those days. His intimate friends alone knew his fund of merriment, his quick eye for grotesque contrasts and unexpected harmonies, and his readiness in wit. Unexpectedness was a refreshing essential quality of his mind, shown in many ways. When in bachelor rooms, he kept a few snakes as pets, and watched their career with an interest half scientific and half humorous. He justified the strange hobby by the strange argument that we ought to feel a special compassion for the snake since it was our fellow sufferer from the tragedy of Eden. His range of interests was very wide. He was a keen athlete, something of a naturalist, an excellent photographer, and a lover of music and sketching. He published a good deal of poetry in various magazines. It was always strong in the sense of mystery and in yearning for the distance, with great charm in phrasing and a haunting musical quality. The workmanship in some poems is so exquisite that there is little doubt he might have gained no inconsiderable rank as a poet but for his steadfast regard to his supreme work.

In all these pursuits the master motive may be traced—the love of beauty. In that light he looked

at everything: by that avenue he came to his life-work. One imagines that the loveliness of the Christian faith lured him in the beginning; and though toil and trial and contact with the sinful and the love of children cast him upon its mightier potencies ere long, he yet never lost the artist view. No one saw the beauty of sorrow more than he. This love of beauty blended with his instinctive purity to become the beauty of holiness in himself and his work.

After leaving College in 1896 Percy Ainsworth was appointed to Horsham for a year, and then spent three years at Weedon, Daventry. This might be called his receptive period. 'I was sent into the country,' he said, 'to rusticate and grow a soul.' Country life had an endless charm for him, and he was intensely happy despite the limited scope of such work. In 1900 he was ordained at Burslem, and went to Felixstowe for a three years' term. The appointment suited him well. The sea comforted his poetic nature, and the congregations of residents and summer visitors encouraged his preaching ability. It was the period when his executive powers were brought to a fine edge. He laboured with minute industry, counting no occasion worthy of less than his best. The pages of the local Church magazine were enriched by writings which are both literature and revelation, evidencing the ripening of thought and style.

Foreword

In 1903 Conference designated him to the care of Wesley Chapel, Birmingham; and the period of achievement and recognition began. Early the following year he married Miss Gertrude Fisk, of Felixstowe. The event was one of God's perfecting touches. All our thoughts of that wedded life and the happy home into which his two children were born are saddened by the memory of its brief continuance; but though so short, it was without flaw or seam—a very perfect thing. No outward interest ever rivalled his joy in his home, and he was at his best there.

Encouraged by the warm appreciation of his people and at their request, he published a small book of addresses on the Beatitudes entitled *The Blessed Life*. Its reception proved that Percy Ainsworth had received an abundant entrance into another province of usefulness. The Rev. Arthur Hoyle, in the *Methodist Times*, gave fine praise to the spiritual insight of the new writer; and other reviews followed. Since then the little volume has travelled far and wide, even crossing the Atlantic to be seed for other men's harvests. His devotional meditations on the Psalms began forthwith to appear in the *Methodist Times*. His writing was as water from a hill-spring, rising from the depths and offering itself in sunshine. He became a welcome noonday preacher at the

Central Hall, and was even honoured with an invitation to the historic pulpit of Carr's Lane, which, however, he was unable to accept.

His last appointment was to the Eccles Circuit, Manchester, where he did a great work. Quietly pursuing the leading of God in his own spirit, he was the same unassuming, brotherly man—the same home-lover—to the end. Recognition brought him no foolish elation, and it could scarcely make him happier than industry, godliness, and 'the joy of the working' had made him before it came. Toward the close of his three years at Eccles the shadows gathered darkly over the home. His wife passed through a serious illness, and there were other like sorrows. Just when his friends were wondering what his next step in good work would be, news came that he was ill with typhoid fever; and before the danger was realized, a further message told that on July 1, 1909, Percy Ainsworth had passed away. His next step was that into the Real Presence: the period of the Life Everlasting had begun.

The following sermons, collected and edited with affectionate care by his friend, the Rev. A. Kenrick Smith, with the assistance and counsel of the Rev. F. R. Smith, are his best eulogy. Much was said about him by sorrowful friends at the various memorial services and in Conference. It is noteworthy that all

these men, each seeking for the truest and deepest word to say, and without any collusion, agree in laying aside reverently his varied talents, his skill of words, his poetic fancy, his mysticism, and find the supreme secret of his power in his goodness. The Rev. F. R. Smith voiced this conclusion in his memorial sermon. 'Percy Ainsworth could never have been Percy Ainsworth but for the purity of his spirit, the depth of his faith, and the strength of his loyalty to God and the service of man.'

W. S. H.

I

The Pilgrim Church

I am a stranger in the earth.—Ps. cxix. 19.

ALL that lies behind these words is more easily felt than set forth. 'I am a stranger in the earth.' We cannot discover that that is a confession of faith, unless we first of all come to understand that it is a confession of feeling. There is something here as elusive and indescribable as the wistfulness of an autumn evening. It defies all analysis. It is not an idea. It is a mood. Now in our busy life we are wont to make light of moods, as it is right and necessary that we should. When there is something to be done, the question of whether or no we are in the mood to do it is of tenth-rate importance. In the presence of manifest duty it is our privilege to treat an unpropitious mood with scant courtesy. We may have to sweep it out of our path without so much as an 'if you please.' Indeed, that is usually the only effective way of dealing with moods that do not fit our tasks. They may seem to be slight wisps of things, but they have a way of barring the path of action. They will

not listen to reason. I think the psychology of it is this, that whenever you argue with a mood, the mood itself provides the argument, and, of course, has a crushing reply ready. No, nothing but a sudden rough handling is of any avail. It is no good asking a mood to stand aside and let you pass. You must knock it down and walk over it. Deeds, not words, is the motto for mere moodiness. But whilst we ought to assert our independence of moods in the fulfilment of our active duties, we are bound to confess our dependence on them in our quest after truth. It is part of the mystery of life that that which is a difficulty in one place is an assistance in another. The very mood that is a foe to action may be a friend to thought. And we need that friend sometimes. Some of the most precious things in life—visions, assurances, understandings—cannot be ours but by the grace of a fit and seemly mood. The mood does not give us these things, nor does its disappearance take them away from us, but it helps us to receive them and it helps us to know that we have them.

Now when the singer of this song spoke of himself as 'a stranger in the earth' he gave utterance to a mood; but if we look for the things that went to the making of that mood we shall find that it stood for a vital and precious experience.

Perhaps there is something here that is inwoven into

human nature. Man has always been a stranger in the earth; and all his efforts to make himself at home, however successful they have been for the moment, have always been pitiably futile in the long run. Paganism in its loneliness coined the phrase, 'Mother earth,' but humanity has found little comfort in the use of it. The phrase claims that our true home life is here in the midst of the years. It seeks to make this world a homelier place than ever it can be. If it had been a true word, this word 'Mother earth,' then the red dawn would have touched men as does the kindling of a hearth-fire, the mountains would have seemed but the massive walls of a garden, the stars would have uttered, in their own grand way, the message that twinkles in the lamplight of a cottage window. But we know, as all who have gone before have known, that this is not so. Man has ever been homeless in the dawn. The eastern light has never domesticated men: it has always made them restless adventurers. The day comes in upon the wings of mystery and sometimes departs with a glory that makes the heart ache, we know not why. The mountains are sacraments of a power beyond our understanding. They do not offer shelter, they waken aspiration. They do not stand for reassuring limits, they search our hearts with a sense of the illimitable. And if the stars are lamps they light an endless pathway. And

then there is the persistent fascination of the skyline. The vital point of human interest has ever been not the hearth but the horizon.

> Just when we're safest there's a sunset touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides—
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
> As old and new at once as nature's self.

So, speaking in a broad sense, we might say that the human soul has always in some dim way felt that it is 'a stranger in the earth.' But the natural man does not like to feel like this. He tries to shake the feeling off. And with some success. True as it is that the earth is full of sacramental meanings, it is equally true that man has been able to settle down in some fashion in spite of them. By dint of making much of his body and little of his soul, much of the outward things of life and little of the inward, much of the hour and little of eternity: in short, by dint of an obstinately irreligious attitude, he has been able to tread the solemn and holy sacraments of life beneath his feet and to reach a measure of satisfaction and comfort amid material things. Indeed, there is a kind of contentment and security, a certain easy familiarity with the world in which we live, an aptitude for trifles, a satisfaction with coarse and fleeting things, that is the Nemesis of unbelief. It is the Christian faith that

touches all this busy world with strangeness for us, and makes us at home in the heavenly places. It is faith that turns life into a brief journey through an alien land and kindles the real homelight beyond the verge of the world. This sense of being strangers in the earth has always marked the lives of the saints. They, of all men, have most deeply felt it and most freely confessed it. They have always sought after 'a country of their own,' always desired 'a better country, that is a heavenly.' They have never settled down, never felt quite at home in the world. Their hearts have ever been toward 'Jerusalem which is above—the mother of us all.' And this is the thing in the life of a saint that the worldling has never understood and never really despised. It must be conceded that the mood in which the world has seemed an alien land has sometimes taken a wrong turn, and has been productive of some aloofness from the common life and some indifference to things that, after all, really matter. But this mood at its best is associated with the most lustrous fidelity, the most splendid endurance, the most catholic sympathy and the most ungrudging service the world has ever known.

Perhaps the Church is too much at home in the world. We talk much about meeting men on their own ground, about understanding the spirit of our age, about keeping abreast of the times. Within certain

very narrow limits there is truth in these phrases; but there is not in all of them put together, and in all kindred pleas and policies, one atom of the truth that saves the world. There are some who would have the Church sit at the feet of the successful business man. They rise in our councils, these baptized worldlings, and talk as if the things we really need could be picked up in the head office of a smart and hustling firm. They say we do not speak the language of the people and are not sufficiently in touch with all the swift, subtle changes in the world's shifting and complex life. And such criticism is wrong, as all shallow things are wrong. It is not this world we need to know better, it is the other world. It is not the language of the street we need to master, it is the language of the kingdom where He reigns whose voice has the music and throb of many waters. We need to move with surer step and keener vision and warmer response amid eternal things. The busy, self-satisfied, successful world may respect us in a way for knowing something of its methods and manifesting some familiarity with the inner fashion of its achievements; but the world in the main is neither successful nor self-satisfied. The sick and the dying, the heartbroken and the desperate, the burdened and oppressed, will find nothing in our easy up-to-dateness to encourage them to trust us with one shamefast confession, one

spiritual difficulty, one precious secret of hope or fear or sorrow.

It is to the stranger in the earth that the fore-wandering souls of men instinctively turn. He is the only man who never loses his way. It is to him that men have ever come in their confusion and their despair. It is the sojourners in the world, the manifest travellers to a better country, who are made the confessors of troubled hearts. It is the pilgrims of the faith who have the only availing mission to this world's deepest bitterness and unbelief. Of course, we cannot travel through the world as the patriarchs travelled through it. We cannot emulate in the outwardness of things the simplicity of the early Christian Church. Our complex organization is inevitable. It were foolish to gird at the 'office work' involved in much of our religious enterprise. Our closer touch with the various movements for dealing with all kinds of social disability and distress will probably increase rather than diminish the need for such work. Since civic and political machinery exists and provides a medium for the expression and enforcement of moral and spiritual convictions, let the Church make the most of it. The cry of 'No politics' is sometimes raised by the devil. But let the Church, having made the most of all the means for doing good provided by the methods and develop-

ments of our corporate life, know that that 'most' is not very much. Let us not think that all this means getting into touch with the world. We are never so near the world, in the one way in which it is worth while being near it, as in those precious hours when all but God and heaven is touched with strangeness for us; and when the heart within us knows, as it knows nothing else, that it seeks a city out of sight.

The Church has sometimes tried to impress the world by her material resources or by her political influence. She has competed with the financier and the diplomatist for the prize of power. And she has failed, as it was utterly right and inevitable that she should fail. She has been the home of learning and the mother of the best civilization; but it is not for these things that her children love her, nor is it for these things that the world at the last will do her honour. Her real work to the world has always lain in this, that she has kept the music of a pilgrim song ringing in men's hearts, making it impossible for them to settle down to the gain and comfort of the hour, easily forgetful of the venture of faith, the crusade of righteousness, and the pilgrimage of love. She has roused life's truest wander-thirst in a world too ready to be content with the thing that is nearest, to take the obvious and immediate for its portion and

its prize, and to try to build a comfortable house where there is scarcely time to pitch a tent.

And the power to do this is the most precious thing the Church has ever possessed. Far beyond her mission and power to make this world endurable she must rank her mission and power to make the other world real. There may be a danger lest this supreme charge of the faith should lose its supremacy with us, and lest we should think to win and hold the people on lower and less spiritual terms.

You will not misunderstand me when I say that we may make too much of our duty to fight against everything that robs men and women and little children of any of the physical comfort, the material advantage, the intellectual and social opportunity that should be theirs. This is our task—a task that the Church shares with many who ignore her faith and contemn her vision. But there is a task that is hers alone, and that is to put men in touch with the eternal world of love and truth and peace—their spiritual fatherland. These two tasks are inseparable, but they are not identical. Some think that by means of its newly aroused social sympathies and activities the Church will rehabilitate herself in the eyes of the world. My friends, in as far as such rehabilitation is necessary, it will take a great deal more than social activities, and institutional methods,

and all the paraphernalia of temporal reform to accomplish it. We do an injustice to the religion we profess, and to the souls we seek to save, if we think we shall gain the ear of the world by an economic gospel. We shall succeed at last in the work God has given us to do. The kingdom will come; but it will only come as we bring to a social programme that seems to be in complete touch with the situation, a faith that makes us strangers in the earth. When men speak of Jesus of Nazareth as having been at home in the world, as having spoken the language of the people, as having taken an interest in the simple round of daily life, they are only playing on the surface of all that Christ was and of all that He meant and did. He was gracious, patient, self-sacrificing, accessible in the world, but He was at home in the heavenly places. He used words that were familiar and simple, and spoke of things men saw about them, but His words always took men beyond the thought of house and field, bread and home, neighbour and kinsman. Men felt that He saw something they did not see, and that His deepest care for them often began just where their care for themselves ended. He spoke their language and seemed to tread their path; but they saw that no man ever spake as He spake, and the best among them knew that He came from God and went to God.

And over the lives of all who love and serve Him He has written these words: 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.' Do you not think that we are in danger of attaching too much outward significance to those words and not enough inward significance? What are the distinctive features of a Christian in the world? Beauty of character? Yes; but there are beautiful lives that do not profess any religious faith. Integrity of conduct? Yes; but there are many lives outside the pale of the Church in whose business and social relationships and dealings it would puzzle you to find a flaw. But the Christian ought to be somehow better than all the kindest and most honest men who do not possess his secret. Surely it lies in his final attitude toward life—his whole valuing and handling of the world. He ought to have this higher loyalty, this spiritual patriotism, this otherworldliness that does not wholly reveal itself in the practice of life's common virtues, much less in any eccentricities of habit, but in the subtle texture of character, in the aroma of influence, in the wistfulness of the soul's outlook. I say it is these things (things that no man can describe and no man can counterfeit) that mark the Christian in the world and plead the cause of the eternal life with the world's heart. Even against a background of high morality the Christian should stand out. We say that a man

is as honest as the daylight, and we seem to have given him high praise. But you apply that phrase to St. Stephen or St. Paul—or, may I say, to Jesus Himself—and it becomes almost an insult. 'They are not of the world'—no, not even of the world at its best. Morality enables a man to face the world with an unflinching gaze; but it cannot teach him to hold the world with a loose grasp. Unworldliness at the last is not a matter of ethics: it is a matter of outlook. We say sometimes that we feel such a man is good. It isn't a calculation: it is an experience. We know beyond all argument that he is not of the world. He belongs elsewhere. And, my friends, I believe with all my heart that we are all called into and capable of a faith that would give to our lives the same haunting, heavenly influence.

There are other things gathering around this phrase, 'A stranger in the earth,' of which one would like to speak. One might point out how this sojourning spirit is woven into all life's availing courage and patience. One can bear a good deal on a journey. As Thomas Champness used to put it—and surely it was one of the loveliest things he ever said—' It's easy passing milestones when you're going home.'

But let it suffice us to remember just this, that to be in touch with human needs we must be filled with heavenly satisfactions; that the world will never be

one whit the better off for our diplomacies and stratagems, our clever opportunism and our time-bred familiarity with life; and that all the really precious things in our earthly heritage are found in the track of a band of pilgrims.

II

Star Counting and Heart Healing

He healeth the broken in heart; . . . He telleth the number of the stars.—Ps. cxlvii. 3, 4.

IT is not easy for us to get these two thoughts into our minds at the same time. Still harder is it for us to think them as one thought. It seems such a far cry from all the stars of heaven to one poor bleeding heart—from those myriad points of fire to a few human tears. We see the sweep of the stars, and we walk in the shadow of pain; but in the bitter things we suffer, how little use we make of the great things we see! The stars set us dreaming and yearning. They carry us out beyond the landmarks of history and the chart of experience. And then just one sharp plea wrung from life in its sore need—and there are no stars. In a moment we are shut up to the short view of life. So easily we get lost in the littleness and the bitterness of things. When the heartbreak comes the starlight goes. Yes, sometimes just a little dust of the road can put the stars out for us. But how comes all this about? Why do starlight and trouble

so often stand unrelated thoughts in our minds, unrelated fact in our lives? One answer is found in the make of our minds. With us one idea often excludes another that really belongs to it. We have not a large enough mental grasp. We look up at the stars and we forget our little world; we look out upon our little world and we forget the stars. We lose the years in the thought of the hour, and the hour in the thought of the ages. We seem unable to hold on to a great thought when we are in one of life's narrow places; yet it is just in that narrow place that the great thought can do most for us. We live by hours, and so we count by hours. We are pilgrims, so our standard of measurement is a step. In our fragmentary thinking we draw dividing lines across the undivided, and fail to see that the limited and the illimitable are not two things but one. We stumble over the very axioms of life. We say it is obvious that the part belongs to the whole; but we often act as if the whole were one thing and the part were another and entirely different thing, and as if there were no discoverable relation between the two. So when this great word about the God who numbers the stars is given to us we say, Let me get away from my little world and think it out. And we do think it out —out of our reach, out of our experience, out of our lives. When shall we learn that we cannot get the

best out of a thought simply by thinking it? To get the real help of a great thought you must trust it, you must live it. Nowadays many people are so busy thinking things out that they scarcely ever think anything in. And it is the truth you think into your life that really counts. And to do that, thought must clasp hands with faith and love and toil. From a purely speculative and intellectual point of view, I defy any man to preach a gospel of comfort from the text, 'He telleth the number of the stars.' Many a man has felt his helplessness and his loneliness beneath the stars. He has said, God is immeasurably remote from my little life down here among the shadows. Is it likely that amid the vast and intricate calculations of the universe He will take account of an insignificant fraction like my life? How should He think upon me when He has all the stars to count? How should He miss me from the fold when He is shepherding all the heavenly hosts? Thus for some the greatness of God has been made to spell the loneliness of man. That is the shivering logic of an intellectual conception of the Deity. The psalmist who spoke of star counting and heart healing in the same breath had got beyond that. The deep, persistent needs of his life had brought him there. It was not by a mere chance that he chose to speak of heartbreak when he sought to link earth with heaven and to lift the fretful mind of

man up to the thought of God's eternal presence and power. Heartbreak is not an idea, it is an experience. Yes, and it is an experience that only the stars can explain and only divinity can account for. It is only in these words, linking stars and hearts together, that we can find a noble and a satisfying interpretation of pain. Why do we suffer? We suffer not because we are akin to earth, but because we are akin to heaven. The final secret of life's pain lies in life's high and eternal relationship. We have a present kinship with the stars and with all they stand for. They stand for the things above us and beyond us, whereof the possibilities and the beginnings are within us. We cannot help wanting to reach them, for the true life of our heart comes from beyond them. It is a greater thing than we have counted it to be. Its native air is blown from beyond the stars. It is up there above the starlight that you must find the explanation of the stricken conscience of the sinner and the yearning heart of the saint. Heartbreak is not to be regarded as a rare and tragic episode in the human story. This world only knows sorrow as an incident. It is, for it, a cloud upon the sun, sometimes darkening all the after day. It is a voice of weeping or a choked silence in the shadowy dusk of the river's edge. But, my friends, the last true sorrow of life is not on this wise. It is not dealt out to one here and another there as

a bitter judgement or a wholesome discipline. It is inwoven into life. To miss it is to miss life. It is the price of the best. It is the law of the highest. When after what we sometimes call the long farewell you have seen a sorrow-stricken man bearing a bleeding heart out to the verge of the world, beyond the last outpost of earthly sympathy and beyond the kindly kingdom of human help, you have seen something for which earth has no healing—but you have not learned anything approaching the whole truth concerning heartbreak. There is the broken and the contrite heart, the heart that is seeking sainthood, and fainting and failing and aching in the quest. There is the broken and the yearning heart, that strains and throbs with lofty longings and the burden of the valley of vision. And to find healing for such sorrow a man must find God. And He must be the God who counts the stars. 'He telleth the number of the stars.' That is a grand, breathless thought, but it is not too grand. No thought of God narrower and lower than that can ever truly comfort us. Only the Infinite can heal the soul. God could not minister to strained hearts if the stars were too much for Him. The mystery of the stars and the mystery of human pain are parts of one great mystery that is no mystery to God, for He dwells beyond it in the light of perfect knowledge, and penetrates it wholly with the warmth

of perfect love. And that is the vision that the human heart will always need. And that is the vision that is fading from some men's minds to-day. Modern theology—at any rate a certain large school of it—is in danger of belittling the greatness of God in its attempts to show His nearness. The immanence of God is a very precious and a very glorious truth, but I think some are in danger of forgetting just now that this truth owes all that is vital and efficient in it to God's transcendence. There was a time when the preacher used to give out for his text, 'Behold, the nations are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing.' He preached the glory and the wisdom and the power of God until men saw the universe as but one ray of all that glory, one word of all that wisdom, one deed of all that power. And with that tremendous background he preached the effectual comfort of the everlasting Father. Some are getting afraid of that background. And we need to remind ourselves that the human heart needs it and demands it, and will never be truly satisfied with anything else. There is nothing else large enough for you to write upon it the meanings and the sanctions and the purposes of God's healing mercy. But to look at it from man's side, the gospel that is to bring availing and abiding comfort to a

world like ours needs a tremendous background: it needs a transcendent sweep. If you have a doctrine of the divine immanence that veils the stars—that seems to make the truth of God a more familiar and compassable thing—that silences the challenge of God's lonely sovereignty and His transcendent and mysterious glory, you have not got the doctrine that will meet your deepest needs or win a response from the depths of other hearts. This shame-stricken, yearning world needs the glory of God as much as it needs His mercy. Jesus came to reveal both. 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.' We can go back into the ages before Christ came, and learn from the psalmist how to apprehend and deliver the gospel of God's saving grace—how to interpret and apply God's final and complete message of healing, sent forth into the broken heart of the world. He telleth the number of the stars. He healeth the broken in heart. The singer of that song linked the healing of man's broken heart with a profound and transcendent conception of God. And the healing of man's broken heart to-day is to be linked with a profound (not intellectually, but morally profound) and transcendent conception of Jesus Christ. Christian people need to be on their guard to-day lest the naturalistic atmosphere that we

cannot help breathing (even if sometimes it nearly chokes us by its lack of oxygen) should lead us unconsciously to place a too humanitarian emphasis on the gospel of the divine Saviour. You may remind men that Jesus drew lessons for life from the lilies and the birds; how that He was glad to watch the patient oxen drawing the simple plough through the brown earth (just such a plough as He Himself had fashioned many a time in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth); how, maybe, He loved the smell of the fresh-turned furrow and the swing of the sower's arm as he scattered the seed; how He smiled on the little children and talked with the tanned and bearded fisherman on the shores of Tiberias. But do not think that this is the story that brings Christ nearest to the heart of the world. We sing—

> Be with me when no other friend
> The mystery of my heart can share;
> And be Thou known when fears transcend,
> By Thy best name of Comforter.

In our weakest and loneliest hours, in the most inward and essential necessities of our lives, it is the mastery and the mystery of the eternity of Christ that we need.

> O to have watched Thee through the vineyards wander,
> Pluck the ripe ears and into evening roam;
> Followed, and known that in the twilight yonder,
> Legions of angels shone about Thy home.

How tremendously true are these words of the poet to the heart's real need and experience. This troubled world does not find peace at the feet of the gracious and inspired and morally perfect Prophet of Nazareth uttering words of wisdom amid the vineyards and in the path through the cornfields. In its profound spiritual sorrow and need, led by the instincts of a broken heart, it has followed the Christ home through the twilight of His humanity on into the glory of His divine Sonship and the light of His eternal dwelling-place. It is to the kingliest and profoundest and most transcendent words of Jesus that the human heart clings. Go to that devout man who lost his dearest friend but yesterday, and ask him what Scripture he read ere he went out this morning into a lonely world. But there! you need not ask him. You know what it was. 'In My Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.' Or go to that man whose heart is aching under the strain of terrible temptation, and ask him what word of the Nazarene is sheltering his soul, and maybe he will say unto you: 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them unto Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

I and My Father are one.' My friends, let us not think that by emphasizing the godhead of Christ we make Him less real or less near to the hearts of the children of men. It is the godhead of Christ that keeps Him near us. It is the mystery of Christ that heals us.

Do not think those are foolish words, or that I am straining after a paradox. It is a matter of common knowledge that the central truth of the gospel—even the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the whole world—has been the focal point of the mightiest thought-conflict of all history. That conflict has not subsided. The thought of the Christian Church has not yet met in one common theory of the atonement. And you are well aware that the leaders in this fight have often been men of saintly lives, who have not failed to find perfect satisfaction and peace and hope at the cross of the world's Saviour. And if there is one paramount lesson to be learned from this battle, where many theories claim the right to account for one experience, it is this, that the Saviour has to pass our highest comprehension in order to meet our deep need. 'He telleth the number of the stars. . . . He healeth the broken in heart.' Do not be afraid to put these two facts side by side. Do not be afraid to carry too divine and mysterious and ineffable a gospel to a suffering world. For it is to

just such a gospel that the human heart will respond. That new school of theology to which I have already made reference has tried, in the interests of what it hoped would be nearer and clearer teaching, to draw a veil across all the mystic starry facts in the gospel story. It has said: 'Men cannot believe in the incarnation of the Son of God. Science has made it impossible for men to believe in such a scientifically lawless event.' But ages before science was born, sin and sorrow and the mysterious fathomless needs of the human soul had made it impossible for men to believe in anything less stupendous and divine. It has said: 'It is no good preaching a gospel of miracle in a clear thinking age like this.' And it has given the world a Christ that few can understand and no one can trust. It has underrated human need. It has compassed the heartbroken with a thievish and impotent philosophy. It has overlooked the fact that a thing may be to a man at once and consciously an intellectual difficulty and a spiritual necessity. My friends, the Christian creed is not a great intellectual production: it is the voice of the Christian experience trying to utter the unutterable. It is the outcome not of what men have thought, but of what they have felt. It is full of that which baffles the mind of the dialectician and builds the life of the saint. And when men have spun their last specious and compassable theory

of religion and of life, the weary and heartbroken children of men will be found breaking through the meshes of argument, sweeping away the human glosses from divine truth, and casting themselves instinctively upon that mystery of mercy and might that is as the mystery of the stars. Yes, and finding at the hands of the God who counts the stars, the touch of healing and the clasp of love.

III

'Tell us Plainly'

If Thou art the Christ, tell us plainly.—JOHN x. 24.

THE significance of this appeal does not dawn on us all at once. Brought before the judgement-bar of 'first sight' it may succeed in passing itself off as a blunt but honest and worthy attempt to find the truth. But first sight is often blindness: and that is how it comes to pass that so many of the judgements delivered in life's court of first inquiry, where things are decided in the twinkling of an eye, have to be reversed. And our text is a case in point. If we look at it carefully we shall come to see that this plea the Jews made to Jesus, so frank and clear in form, was blind, irreverent, and unjust. 'If Thou art the Christ, tell us plainly.' The underlying assumption of that plea was that the person and place of Jesus Christ could be summed up in a sentence, made plain in a few words, concluded in a brief, positive statement. As such, this plea betrayed ignorance of the true nature of spiritual knowledge, the most dreadful ignorance in life. It revealed a wrong

attitude towards eternal truth. It was an utter misconception of the meaning and method of a divine revelation. It flouted the precious mystery of the gospel. It ignored the sacred message of life's parables and the vital teaching of its sacraments. It utterly discounted the tremendous power of spiritual suggestion, and discredited all the truest instincts of the soul. And most of all, and worst of all, it belittled the person and teaching and whole fact of Christ. And keeping in touch with these thoughts, without perhaps following any one of them very far, I would have us gain such a view of the nature of spiritual truth, and of the way it is made manifest in human life, as shall save our minds and hearts from the darkness—the narrow temporality of this plea that the Jews made to Jesus—'Tell us plainly.'

All speech has its limitations, and the plainer the speech the narrower are those limitations. A plain truth is necessarily a small truth. If you are determined to say a plain thing you must be content to say a very little thing. If plainness is your one object you are committed to a fragmentary conception of truth. Of course, I am speaking of the world of abiding spiritual realities. You can summarize all the outward facts of life. You can put exact account of the weather into a sentence. And wherever it is possible to be terse and concise and sharply definite, it is our

duty to try to be so. In our concrete life, amid all outward things, most of us would be better understood if we said less. The things of the hour demand a plainness of speech that befits the definition and brevity of the hour. It is our duty to put a thing into a nutshell—if it is no bigger than a nut. But when we try to put illimitable truth into a nutshell, we leave a good deal of it out. And that which we may think we have stated we have probably misstated. Limitation is own brother to perversion. History tells us that it has never been more than a few steps from the shrine of the partly true to the shrine of the wholly false.

If a man can always say what he means, then he does not always mean enough. A man may sacrifice the eternal, the essential, the mysterious, the imperishable in the interests of plain speech. He may come unconsciously to distrust the thing he cannot state—which is very likely the one absolutely trustworthy thing in his life. And by-and-by there may come a day when his collection of sharp definitions, and compassable half-truths, and literal explanations shall seem to him to exhaust the meaning of life. He has fashioned out of the hours and the occasions of life a local universe, an infinity caught and destroyed in the coils of an explanation, an eternity that is written on the face of a clock. He has fallen into that most

subtle materialism that has done so much to weaken the force of Christian dogmatics, and that has made blind hours even in the lives of the saints; the materialism that seeks to imprison for ever a living and growing thing in a final and inelastic form, to deal with the infinite as if it were finite, and to set limitations to the illimitable—in the name of plainness.

But if you leave the last word of the Jews' plea out of your reckoning, the plea itself is still a pitiably blind and vain one. 'If Thou art the Christ, tell us.' That appeal, as it stands, reveals an utter ignorance of the way the truth advances in the earth and makes its conquests in the souls of men. That advance and conquest are not made essentially by means of words. The truth depends strangely little upon verbal statement. Think of some of the great moments in our common earthly experience, and you will find that even there silence is the guerdon of life's highest knowledge and most abiding assurance. We watch the path of the dawn growing wider across an eastward sea, or feel the infinite suggestion of skyline at eventide, or listen to immortal harmonies until we hear, as Keats has put it for us in one of the greatest lines in our language, 'the music yearning like a god in pain,' or we find the bitter-sweet meaning of love, or stand by a grave as deep as our heart, and lo! we know something that could never have been told us and that we can never

tell to another. Our silence may be the silence of the inarticulate, but it is also the silence of the enlightened. We know with a clearness compared with which the clearest speech is mere jargon. We see with a vision that words, like a flock of birds, would only darken with their wings.

And as it is with such great moments in our inner life, so it is with life's most sacred relationships. The two great bonds of social life are justice and love. Look at these things. Consider the very terms of their existence. Honour, one of the loveliest blooms of justice, dwells in silence. It is an unutterable thing. To try to state it is to make it something less than it is. To explain it is to make it impossible. To fling it about in gusts of words, as men have flung it, is to reduce it, as men have reduced it, to a mere fiction, void of all that is vital and binding. Without honour life at its best is impossible. But honour is the last thing that is mentioned among honourable men. If they speak of it we know some one has lost it, and words will never bring it back again. Or what need of words has love? They are not merely unnecessary, they are confusing. To assert some things—and love is one such thing and chief among them—is to cast suspicion on their reality. If there are conditions that seem to demand their declaration, these same conditions make that declaration vain. And the lesson of

this law of silence running through life is just this. The knowledge of a thing comes not by the telling thereof. No man was ever told anything finally worth knowing. No hearsay ever broke the silence of life's inner room. It is not by means of the utterances, the assertions, the dictations and definitions and reasonings of them that teach that ever any man gained one truth for the everlasting succour of his soul. The hours that bring the truth into a man's soul are hours when the truth stands before him, in all its radiant beauty too fair to need adorning, in all its splendid strength too strong to need support, in all its final and irresistible simplicity too simple to be interpreted. And the question of how many and how luminous these hours shall be we each decide for ourselves. Jesus Christ came to kindle that light of truth for us in every hour and place of life. He has made all the hours luminous for the humble and obedient heart. In Him the eternal truth is always with us. That which we call the blankness of our outlook is really the blindness of our hearts. For a man given up to his prejudices, his passions, and his sins, every hour is a blind hour. It is the better will and not the clearer mind that catches the first gleam of that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. In the matter of everlasting and final truth no man can be intellectually certain whilst he is

morally undecided. When the Jews said, 'If Thou art the Christ, tell us plainly,' they ignored all this. They failed to grasp the moral and spiritual nature of Christ's Messiahship. They did what men, to their endless perplexity and distress, have done in all ages —they confused between information and assurance. They missed the real reason for Christ's presence in the world. Jesus did not come primarily to tell men anything. Jesus came rather because the world had been told all it could be told. The ministry of voices and messages had reached its limits. Age after age the Word had come to men through priest and judge and prophet. Age after age the great preface, 'Thus saith the Lord,' had rung in men's ears and called to their hearts. And it was not enough. On this wise God Himself could not make His world wise unto salvation. So the Word was made flesh. God clothed Himself not with language, but with life. Christ is not God's messenger to the world—He is God's message. So He answered the questioning Jews, 'I told you.'

When had He told them? When had He not told them? His presence in the world, His character, His spirit, His whole life, were one ceaseless utterance of eternal truth. And if the Jews did not know this, Jesus could not tell them. Statement could not succeed where influence was unavailing. If *He* did

not convince them, His words were of no avail. If they did not feel something of what He was, they could not accept anything He might say about Himself. For as He stood before them He gathered into His own person the first and last meanings of goodness, truth, and love. In answering Philip's blind and disappointing plea, 'Show us the Father,' Jesus fastened upon one privilege, one supreme opportunity that Philip had failed to turn to much account, and it was the privilege of living under Christ's influence. 'Have I been so long with you and hast thou not known Me?' In these words Jesus surely appealed to something stronger than any claim He had made, more wonderful than any work He had wrought. My claims may have staggered you, My works may have mystified you; but, Philip, what about Me Myself?

In the case of another disciple, still more clearly did Jesus point out the way of the soul to Himself. When Simon made his great confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' he won the joyous benediction of Jesus. But why? 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.' Simon had heard that which could not be uttered. He had grasped that which could not be formulated. He had understood that which could not be explained. He had responded not to what Christ said, but to what Christ was.

His moral and spiritual attitude was the precise reverse of that revealed by the plea, 'If Thou art the Christ, tell us plainly.' He had companied with Jesus and communed with Him and learned to love and obey Him; and so he came where all who do this have ever come, into touch with that eternal truth of God that no words are strong enough to carry or clear enough to set forth, the word beyond all words.

And we can all come there if we will. Jesus, who could not answer this plea of the Jews for a plain statement concerning Himself, always assumed that He did not in the first instance require to be explained to any soul that really needed Him. Perhaps we who would preach Christ overlook that fact. Perhaps we spend too much time explaining Christ, and not enough proclaiming Him. 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.' 'Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Jesus stood in the world open-armed. He called to men amid their burdens, toils and sorrows, amid the very things that confuse the mind, and crush hope and enterprise, and make for indifference and despair. And it follows that He must be life's simplest and most easily found fact for us all. There must be some perfectly simple point of contact between every human life and the divine Saviour. And there is,

We need but to accept the verdict of our conscience, the ultimatum of our human weakness, the sorrow that waits for every sinful soul in the dreadful quietness of life, and lo! our trembling hands have touched the Christ, and if we will let Him He will hold us fast for evermore and lift us surely up to all the light and love of God. But when we have touched the fact of Christ we have not grasped it. And it is just here that so many go wrong. It is here that the foolish and sometimes petulant plea, 'tell us plainly,' comes in. People underrate the tremendous sweep and the profound reach of the fact they have just touched. Jesus is not only the simplest need of the human soul, He is the supreme fact of the universe. He is at once the source and gathering-point of all the scattered light which from the dawn of human history to this moment has led man in his quest after God. The fact of Christ is a stupendous fact. It stands alone, not because it is distinct from all other facts, but because it includes them. Every man is needy enough if he but knew it, and maybe humble and morally earnest enough, to find the fact, but no man shall ever be wise enough to compass the fact.

My brother, perhaps, like some of old, you are waiting for a plain word. You think that some day you will find the gospel of Jesus summed up for you in a lucid sentence by the preacher, made clear and self-

evident in a creed by a theologian, carried beyond all doubt by a bit of terse logic. Remember this, if you forget all else, that Jesus does not begin by telling us anything. He touches us. Your unrest, your heart-hunger, the haunting shame of your yesterdays, the haunting beauty of the ideal, the longing for purity that will not be stifled, the judgements whispered in the inner room, and all that sets you wrong with yourself and the brother at your side and your Father in heaven: all this, I say, is the work of the pierced hands of Eternal Love upon your soul. And it is vain to ask one question till you have answered that touch.

And suppose we grow impatient of the shadows and the mysteries that hang over and surround the path of faith. We forget that the Christ whose hand of mercy is stretched out, and who was so simply and tenderly here amid the shadows of our pilgrimage, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, and that He is before all things and in Him all things consist. We forget the cosmic note in such claims as these: 'I am the bread of life,' 'I am the light of the world,' 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' It is not in one hour but in every hour of life we come to find or miss the Christ of God. It is not by one act but by every act of life we draw near to or pass away from the eternal Saviour. He is for

us the very world in and beyond the world. He is the total circumstance of the soul. And whilst one humble, tear-blurred look into His face of pity, one frail but earnest groping for His hand of help, one cry to Him out of the darkness and weakness of our soul, one quiet, solemn, life-deep vow of amendment by His grace, shall make us His, yet we need every throb of our heart, every thought of our mind, every instinct of our soul, every avenue of our being, every hour of our life, yes, and surely all that waits us in that timeless life beyond the years, to bring us from the outer rim of light on towards the glowing centre; to bring us from the first tremulous hope and assurance of the awakened soul on into the vast, immeasurable certainties of Christian communion, and the vast, immeasurable possibilities of Christian sainthood.

IV

A Plea for the Priceless

It might have been sold.—MARK xiv. 5.

THAT suggestion came from Judas. That was all he could find to say about the precious ointment poured forth from its alabaster vase in the service of love. The Bethany circle had united to do honour to Jesus. A meal was served in the house of Simon the leper, possibly because his was the most commodious house available. Look at the picture. The Master in the place of honour. The disciples near Him, Martha waiting at table, Lazarus looking out on things with the light of his second life in his eyes, Mary with the inner vision of a loving heart reading in the Master's face a shadow of things to come. A hush in the talking. Mary kneeling at the Master's feet, the broken vase, the perfume floating through the room. A silence in which love eternal was trying to say something to each man's heart; then, as is often the case in life, the first man to break the silence was the man to whom the silence had said nothing. 'It might have been sold,'—and we feel

that vandal feet have trampled the vase and its precious burden into the dust, and that the roar of the market has swept into the sanctuary of one worshipping, love-laden, life-laden moment. Judas gazed with unseeing eyes upon one of those things so central in the literature of the world, but so rare in its life—a spontaneously dramatic scene. He mishandled a beautiful situation. And his bad taste does violence to our artistic sense. But, my friends, we have to deal with something far more serious than bad taste. It is very easy to overestimate the value of taste. In all the higher civilization of the world there is a tendency to allow good taste to atone for bad character. Aesthetics—with its pseudo-spirituality—usurps the moral authority of the judgement-seat of life. Refinement is substituted for reformation, and among some people a polished sinner gets more respect than an uncouth saint. These people charge Judas with taking a business view of the situation. But the real charge to be brought against him is that he got no view of it at all. If he sinned against art, it was not art as it is interpreted by the aesthetic temperament, with its not seldom false and uncatholic view of a workaday world, with its profound conviction that a man who paints pictures must be altogether superior to a man who makes boots—it was against art as it stands for the unpur-

chasable and imperishable and eternal—and that is the fabric of man's true life. That little pale-faced mite who stopped you in the street yesterday as you were carrying home a bunch of flowers to your wife, and said, 'Give me a flower,' was not a beggar. She was an artist. It was her response to the vision beautiful. Her plea for the priceless. It was a voice confessing amid the rattle of the street that 'man doth not live by bread alone.'

Judas stood among the priceless things that day in Simon's house, and the plea for them was stifled in his soul. He was not, as a certain false aestheticism would make him out to be, a worse man for keeping the bag. Some one must keep it. But the pity of it was that Judas had come to believe that the bag could keep him. And that is the peril against which we must be on our guard. Not specifically as business men, for this is not essentially a peril of the market-place. Broadly stated, it is the danger of becoming lost in the temporalities, earth-fed and earth-filled. It is the danger of trying to express the whole of life in terms that apply only to a very small part of it. Commerce is just what men make it. The heart that seeks first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, the love that seeketh not its own, can make a man's ledger a poem of honesty and charity worthy a place among all beautiful things; but if he never gets beyond

market values, if there is nothing of all that he loves and lives for that he cannot ticket with a price, if he knows much of what money can do and little of what it cannot do, then he is blind in the house beautiful, starved amid the bounty of the Lord.

Judas missed in Simon's house not a dramatic scene, but an eternal truth. Only a shallow and unspiritual judgement will think less of him for knowing the selling-price of alabaster and nard. His sin lay in that he had lost the power to see in these things a sacrament of 'the life that is life indeed.' But it would be an empty vindication of Judas to say that his suggestion is 'true as far as it goes.' A thing has to go a certain distance before it begins to be true. It has to touch the spiritual and eternal in life, and Judas missed that. And so this man, with his market price and his mental arithmetic, was not an intruder —he was an outsider. He was not inopportune, he was unspiritual. He was heartblind. The fact that he priced the gift proves that he never saw it. To have seen it was to have known it was priceless.

O these priceless things—how we miss them! How Jesus pleaded for them! And Judas had companied with that unworldly life, had heard the Master say that Solomon in his state robes was not so well dressed as a wild flower, and that the widow's half-farthing was worth more than the jewels of the

rich, and that the cup of cold water was worthy a heavenly reward ; had heard the rich promises of the kingdom pledged to the poor of the earth : and yet he had not learned that there are things too beautiful to be sold. All the best things are given away. Do we realize what a ghost and travesty of possession lurks in the act of purchase? You can buy a book of poems : the soft bindings are yours, the gilt edges are yours, the handmade paper is yours, but not the poetry. No man was ever rich enough to buy a poem. If it is his, he must have it as the unpurchasable gift of God to his soul. And as surely as you cannot buy a poem, so you cannot buy a home, or a happy hour, or a good conscience, or a rich hope. Trite old story, yes, but we must go on telling it till the vital truth it implies has fashioned the practices of the world. And it can—for the positive side of this teaching is the doctrine of grace. God's mercy for the undeserving, His treasure for the poor, His fullness for the empty. The wealth of our lives is the love that brings the vision beautiful and welds men heart to heart, the sympathy that gives insight, the faith and hope that enrich the spirit, the morning joy of Jesus in the souls of them that crown Him and the lives of them that serve Him.

'It might have been sold.'

That is, I think, the most vulgar remark on record,

How that wonder of love in Simon's house was cheapened for the man from Iscarioth! How the shadow of a material judgement obscured for him the spiritual dignity and glory of Mary's service! Judas did not know what he was dealing with. He may have been an authority on spikenard. Perhaps he could have told us the precise meaning of that strange word *pistikes*, which St. Mark used to describe the ointment, and which bids fair to remain one of the minor puzzles of his Gospel. But he was not dealing with alabaster and spikenard. And, my friends, we never are. Life is made up of things that defy all valuation by this world's standard—things the worth of which can only be expressed in that mystic coinage that is stamped with the image of One wearing a crown of thorns, and has for its superscription, 'Ye did it unto Me.'

And it is missing these things that degrades and vulgarizes life. For some of you this service is a brief pause in the day's work. You must be back at your work at two o'clock. Yes, but what are you going back to? Back to sell so much of your time and strength to your employer for a certain wage. That is a life any man might well learn to despise. But hear the plea for the priceless. Take that back in your hearts. You can handle goods and earn wages, but, O my brother! there is more in the day's

work than that. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. Against such there is no law' —yes, and on such there is no price. They are the rich gift of God to your soul, and you have the ennobling right to give them to your brother, who will never be rich enough to buy them at your hands. Go back to your work with His Spirit in your hearts, and, instead of being a wage-earner, you shall be a dispenser of the means to live, and for you the leaden shackles of earthly necessity shall be transmuted into the golden freedom of love and truth, and minted into the largesse of willing service.

'It might have been sold.'

We have heard a good deal recently about the simple life. The one eternal authority on the simple life said, 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.' If the setting of life is to be simple, the aim and content of life must be spiritual. It is not primarily a matter of earthly economies. It is not a matter of learning to live within your income. That will not solve the problem. It is the attempt to do that which is making the problem. Multiply your income by anything you like and still it will not keep you. The simplest thing that goes to make life is beyond your income.

In the world of the heart no man can pay his way.

The extravagance of the rich and the thriftlessness of the poor are ultimately accounted for by blindness to the priceless things. So, my friends, let us take this dictum of Judas: this classic utterance of materialism, and judge it by that life which Jesus has revealed to us—the life that trusts the fatherhood of God and the saviourhood of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Spirit; that is lived by the faith that transfigures duty, and the prayer that links life's poverty to God's illimitable resources; the life that loves mercy and justice, and looks for the city of God beyond the earthly need and the earthly nightfall,—and we shall see the frightful falseness of the material estimate of life, and shall become both prophets and exponents of the sublime simplicity of living.

And now let us follow Judas from Simon's house to the house of his Master's enemies. We must do this. We cannot deal with the three hundred pence and say nothing of the thirty pieces of silver, for they are part of the same calculation. The blindness in the house of Simon and the bargain with the chief priests are parts of the same thing. The man who cannot see the priceless is quite capable of selling it. That is the logic of history. That is the tragedy of materialism. This man sold his honour, his place in the brotherhood, the great trust of his life, and the very love of God. Men little think what impieties,

treacheries, and shames lurk beneath the materialistic appraisement of life. This is peculiarly a peril of the city. Our brethren who till the soil and wait in field and garden for God's sunshine and His rain have all about them a sacrament of the priceless things. But we who dwell amid so much that is artificial, so much that is not easily suggestive of the unseen sources and spiritual values of life, may perhaps think ourselves in special danger of judging earthly judgements. But, after all, whether a man drive a ploughshare or drive a bargain, there is but one way of escape from the peril of the earthly view and the earthly valuation—a peril never far from the hearts of the children of men. And that is in the evangel of the grace of God. Art has fought in vain with the coarse and stubborn materialism of the world. Aestheticism, with its eclectic discipleship and its demand for a measure of intellectual refinement, has never been able to make the plea for the priceless a real factor in the life of a workaday world. Only Christ can do that. In His cross He has revealed life to us as the priceless gift of God to every humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart.

> Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to Thy cross I cling.

If once a man has come empty-handed to the mercy of God in Christ; if day by day he stretches out

these same empty hands to the Giver of life; if his heart has tasted of the fullness awaiting him beyond the voices of the market and the pledges of the world —then beauty and truth and love and all the spiritual reality of life are his, and the basal plea for the priceless is for ever wakened and answered in his soul.

V

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes

And Simon answering said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy command I will let down the net.—LUKE v. 5.

I PURPOSE to treat this incident of the miraculous draught of fishes in a more or less parabolic way. We shall be standing by the Sea of Galilee, but we shall be thinking and speaking of the sea of life. We shall be watching a few fishermen coming ashore, first with empty boats at dawn of day, and then with boats laden almost beyond the point of safety with a great catch of fish; but behind the picture I want us to find some of the inner meaning of success and failure upon wider and more perplexing waters.

But before we take up the parable let us be quite sure that we have fast hold of the miracle. Since the text is a miracle, and the sermon is going to be a parable, a word of explanation is perhaps necessary. At any rate, this kind of exegesis needs to be carefully

safeguarded. One of the tendencies of modern teaching is to take refuge in parables, because the atmosphere just now is supposed to be trying to miracles. There are so many self-appointed wonder-slayers in the world. The latest St. George—a not too attractive or inspiring figure be it said—has ridden forth glittering from helmet to spear with a shining preparation known as 'the new light' to slay the dragon of mystery. The mistake that he and his followers make is this. They think mystery is something that can be localized, tracked to its lair, and finally encountered. They do not feel how inescapable and intimate a thing is mystery. It is in the loom of mystery that the thread of our life is spun. Mystery is the very make of us. It is the atmosphere we breathe. To slay the mystery of life a man would have, soon or late, to slay himself. But until he has some vision of the suicidal issue of his undertaking the wonder-slayer puts all his heart into his work. And one of his favourite expressions when he is dealing with this ineffably mysterious Book is the word 'parable.' He snatches this and that great Old Testament or New Testament story out of our hands and tears the historic framework out of it, and then hands it back to us a nerveless and shapeless something that he calls a parable. In the name of the new light—a thing very reminiscent of ancient darkness—he

confiscates the wonder, and majesty, and divinity of some great scriptural scene, and then, with a generosity that some of us entirely fail to appreciate, he says, 'There, I won't take it all; you can keep the lesson.'

And I am afraid many people are disposed to try to get along with that. There is a danger of our being more conciliatory at times than the fundamental principles of the divine revelation really justifies. We are prone to say concerning the miracles in the story of Jesus, 'Well, never mind whether or no it really happened. There are some very beautiful lessons to be learned from it. Let us learn the lessons, and leave the miracle alone.' Now, as far as some incidents are concerned, this might seem a profitable and pacific way of using our New Testament; but it involves a profound mistake. It suggests that the real need of the world is a few gracious, timely lessons. But the failure of so many teachers—teachers with music in their voices, sympathy in their hearts, and logic in their minds—gives the lie to that suggestion. My friends, the world's great need is not a lesson, it is a miracle—the crowning, all-inclusive miracle of grace. Jesus lifts us not as we call Him Rabbi, but as we call Him God over all, blessed for ever. So we must insist on the miracle. A man might find a plausible explanation of a great haul of fish; but having explained that and a few other wonders, he

has to explain an empty sepulchre; and some—God forgive them!—have done that, with much talk about credulity and the growth of legend, and have turned their pledge of immortal victory into an outworn romance born among a few credulous enthusiasts.

So as we take up a parable this morning, let us do it with a full sense of the miracle within and behind it—not necessarily a miracle of creation, but certainly a miracle of knowledge. Let us assert the wonder of the tale, not because we would pay some arbitrary or orthodox tribute to the divinity of Jesus Christ, but because these passion-haunted, sorrow-laden, storm-driven lives of ours need a wonder, a supremacy, a miracle of help, compared with which the swift filling of two empty boats is but a simple thing. And now, with a good conscience, to our parable.

'We have toiled all night, and have taken nothing.' That was not the first vain night by a good many that they had spent on the Sea of Galilee. Mind you, these men were no novices. They knew their business. They had known the Galilean Sea from their boyhood—all its moods and tempers, its dangers and its possibilities. The story of their bread-winning life had been told upon its waters. They were experts, and their boat was empty. They had worked hard and worked wisely, and the sea had beaten them. In spite of the instincts and love of a lifetime on

its waters, it can send a man ashore with an empty boat.

And on the greater sea where you and I do our work the same story is ever being told. It is a difficult story to understand. It is beyond us all. The failure of the foolish, the incompetent and the lazy is a foregone conclusion. But how often do we see the wise, strong, earnest, capable souls coming from their toils with nothing to show! It is a piece of pitifully false reasoning that would account for the seeming vanity of effort by suggesting that the man who made it was incompetent. Some of the best-equipped lives the world has known have seemed to be associated with failure rather than with success. For all of us periods of unfruitful and unrewarded toil are only too familiar. For the fisherman in the bay, for the toiler among human souls, life holds something not fortuitous, but incalculable. There is always the unknown quantity, always the equation we cannot solve. It would seem that it is not the will of God that we should in our toil for Him feel ourselves masters of the situation. It must be enough to know that He is Master of it. No Christian worker can say, 'My work is there. I hold every thread of it in my hands.'

When I left college and went to my first charge, in a Sussex village, I took, as became a probationer, a lordly and spacious suite of rooms at the village

wheelwright's. My window looked into his yard. I could see him at work—and I sometimes envied him. He could make a cart-wheel. He could finish it. He could promise it for the day after to-morrow. And I, I could not say for all my praying and preaching when these rough farm lads or that poor village toper who always came to service on Sunday evening—and always sober, except once at a harvest festival—would be fashioned unto God's high uses. Soon or late we have to learn that maybe it is beyond the range of our wisest reckonings that we read the profoundest articles of our working creed. The sea is His and He made it, and the spoils of land and heart are in His keeping, and without Him we can do nothing. Life is so fashioned that, whilst we can all see the value and necessity of trying to become experts, yet the hours teach us that more precious than any skill of service we shall ever attain unto is the simplicity of our faith and the depth of our patience.

Again, success and failure are deep and inward things. No surface judgement ever truly appraises them. The world reads failure in an empty boat. God reads failure in an empty heart. 'We have toiled all night, and have taken nothing.' Well, what of that? That is no tragedy if you can say, 'We have toiled all night, and have lost nothing.' This is where you begin to see right into the heart of the worker's

failure—not the thing he did not win, but the thing he did lose.

Hopelessness, indifference, weak despondency, foolish desperation, cynical unbelief, these are the things that go to make real failure. It is not our ignorance and clumsiness that baffle the Almighty—it is our despair. When Peter put out into the night on the former of the two ventures with which we are concerned, he had his skill, his experience, his calculations. He had noted the hour and read the sky—and he came back with an empty boat. The next time he put forth, all these things had become secondary matters. The simple, sufficient inspiration of his second venture was the word of his Master. It is evident from something that St. John says that this was not Simon's first meeting with Jesus. Fresh from His baptism in Jordan and His trial in the wilderness, Jesus had met and talked with Simon, and the seeds of a splendid faith were already germinating in the disciple's heart. 'Nevertheless at Thy command I will let down the net.' I am afraid we do not always get so far as that. 'We have toiled all night, and have taken nothing.' Too often that is our reply to the Master as He bids us launch out into the deep—bids us hope, and believe, and endeavour. We meet Him with a bit of barren experience. We fling in His face the bitter cry of life's unfruitful

hours—and for the response of faith we substitute the misleading logic of an empty boat.

'We have toiled all night.' The night was the right time for fishing. If they had had no success then, what chance was there in the glare of the sun? Oh how we are snared in the traditions of our toil! How we are limited by the little that we have had time to justify! How conventional and unenterprising are these hearts of ours in the wide world of the spirit! Fancy putting to sea in the middle of the morning! Everything was against it, except the word of the Master; but Simon came to know ere his life-work was done that that is the most tremendous and significant exception in all the world. We talk about the exception that proves the rule. This is the exception that transcends the rule—that shows the rule to be, not as we supposed it a rigid law of life, but rather part of the foolish bondage of our faithless and timorous spirits. My friends, there is a danger lest we should know better than to do the things that would help us to succeed. There is a failure that comes of putting experience before faith. Sometimes we are too wise to succeed—worldly-wise. There is one with whom the darkness and the light are both alike, and ever His word avails in the lives of them that are willing to receive it. God's word is never inopportune. The commandment of Heaven always

interprets the real and unseen possibilities of the situation. Obedience is success. Therefore let us have done with our poor little atheistic time-limits, our prating of the probable and the seasonable, our o'erweening respect for the almanac, and let us trust the timeless wisdom of our God, whose voice is in our hearts every day.

'Launch out into the deep and let down your nets.' That was simple enough. Just the old way—the familiar means. That is a word for the novelty-mongers and the sensationalists—the people who believe in a creed of surprises, in salvation by astonishment, who would always be giving the world something to stare at, a gospel of interesting bewilderment. Some of this way of thinking, when they get tired of railing at the 'old teaching,' turn their attention to the old building in which that teaching is given. 'A fig for your fine old sanctuary!' they say. 'You will never save a soul in this town till you build a central hall.' In their less ambitious discontented moments they concentrate on the pulpit and the choir. 'Down with that pulpit. The gospel that reaches the people must be preached from a rostrum. And as for the choir—well, the sweet singers in Israel need drowning in the tumultuous waves of a vast orchestra.' My friends, the workers in the Manchester Mission know that I am not suggesting a breath of disapproval

of the means used to reach the masses in our great towns and cities. If I grew hoarse with denunciation it would make no difference. The thing has justified itself ten times over. The Church must speak to the world in a way that will win a hearing and a response. Let us have no cast-iron forms. Let us not be the slaves of precedent. But I do say three things. To all who prate contemptuously about the 'old teaching' I would say: Novelty is a lie. It is born of shallowness. When you ask for a new gospel, you ask for something that is not true. Penitence, and faith, and prayer, and faithfulness, and the love that seeketh not its own—these are the timeless things. To those who have lost their faith in their own local sanctuary whatever its architecture, I say, You never had any business to be putting your working faith into bricks and mortar. What you really need is not a central hall, but a central faith. You are worshipping the accidents of religion and unconsciously contemning the essence of religion. You want a new boat, and the latest thing in nets, and some patent bait—and you cannot hear the voice of Christ bidding you without another thought about boat and tackle, launch out and let down your nets. And to all of you, I say that in the story of Christian service history repeats itself because it has nothing better to say, We need more faith in the possibilities of routine.

We need to become interpreters of life's monotonies. The path of the familiar, trodden with the voice of Christ in a man's ears, has ever led on to the splendid surprises of life. 'Launch out and let down your nets.' Go out to your work in the world, the toils that custom has staled and long familiarity has belittled, and know that the beaten path of life skirts the kingdom of the miraculous, and leads into the divine wonderland, if only we hear ever afresh the call of Christ.

Again, these men succeeded where they had failed. The old sphere of their labours was the sphere of their reward. Some people have but one suggestion to offer when they have failed. It is this: 'We will try somewhere else.' Because they have caught nothing they conclude that there is nothing to catch. That is often the logic of the self-inflated and the impatient; but in some way or other the thought comes to most of us now and again. It is perhaps only natural that we should dream of better work in a new field. We all have to face some element of the uncongenial and the adverse. We tire of the setting of our task. We ministers, with whom the familiar thing is unfamiliarity and the abiding thing is a constant moving on—well, we get tired of that. We all need to know that the one vital necessity of our lives is to be sought, not in the setting, but in the spirit of them. Any boat will

do if Christ bids you launch it. Any hour is a harvest hour if Christ bids you let down the net.

Just one other thought. The men who succeeded were the men who had failed. Failure is not a standing disability in the service of the kingdom. In the world it is sometimes a final disqualification, an unpardonable sin. The world says to the failures, 'Stand aside and let some one else try. You have had your chance. Now make room for a better man.' He is always a better man, this man who has not tried. The world is quite agreeable that the boat should be launched again, but it stipulates for a different crew. And some are too ready to accept the stipulation and drop out. I wonder how many ministers last year received at least one note from a steward, a leader, a Guild secretary, containing the phrase, 'Let some one else try.' Note the way of Jesus. 'Launch out,' you men who but lately came ashore with empty nets. That is Christ's way with the depressed worker. It may be that here to-day some of us have a keen and humiliating sense of the futility of some past days. It may be that there is a sigh of despondency in our hearts, a shadow of indifference upon our outlook. Our work has taken a good deal out of us. No work is any good that doesn't do that. The price of our best work is heartache. But whilst the aching is at its worst and

the bright end of endeavour is for a while out of sight, we are tempted to think many foolish things—tempted to discount the worth of it all, tempted to criticize the conditions of our labour or to distrust the issue of it.

My friends, I dare say we need many things, more skill, strenuousness, patience; but most of all we need one thing—an ear tuned to catch through the urgencies, difficulties, monotonies of life the voice of the great Master of our souls and of our toils. We need the faith folded in Simon's word, 'Nevertheless at Thy command.' Oh, if only we can go out into the world to pit the command of Christ against our weariness, our sense of difficulty, and (a harder thing to do) against the reckonings of our experience and the earthly probabilities, then, come what may, each hour shall count for all it ought to count for, and the end shall be the highest success of all, even the doing of God's will.

VI

The Synagogue and the House

When they were come out of the synagogue they came into the house.—MARK i. 29.

THE synagogue and the house, the church and the home, the sanctuary and the street, worship and work, religion and daily life—these things have ever a tendency to dwell apart in our thought and vision. They each have a meaning for us, but so often these meanings clash. They seem to gather round different things and to lead in opposite directions. And our failure to bring these things together—the spiritual distance that so often lies between the synagogue and the house—accounts for all our other failure to harmonize and understand the manifold experiences of life. It is very difficult for us to realize the unity of life. We think that we miss seeing it because of the endless and bewildering diversity of human experience, because life is so broken up, because the hours seem to contradict each other and the vital sequences of events are so often hidden from us.

But the true explanation of our inability to unify life lies not in the fact that human experience is thousandfold, but in the fact that it is twofold. Capernaum has gone, and the earth has long since drawn its veil of green over the site of the synagogue where Jesus sat and taught, and of the cottage where dwelt Simon the fisherman; but the synagogue and the house stood for things upon which the years can leave no obliterating dust. They stood for life's most difficult antithesis, for its most profound and crucial paradox. They remind us that heaven and earth are ever calling to our hearts, ever laying hands upon our lives. They teach us that the real battle of life for us all has to be fought out, not between this hour and the next, but between every hour and the life everlasting. They symbolize the needs of the soul and the needs of the body: the two communions that together fulfil life for every man, fellowship with God and fellowship with humanity. And so I want us just now to watch Simon and Andrew, James and John, with Jesus in their midst, making their way through the narrow, crooked streets of a little fishing-town from the synagogue on the hill to a cottage on the shore. And I want us to learn as we watch them something about the oneness of life in Jesus Christ.

Jesus had but recently called these four to follow

Him. What authority and what tenderness, what power of appeal and suasion there was in that voice we can but dimly imagine. We know this much at least, that it won these fishermen from their boats and their nets, and from that Galilean sea whose moods and music were woven into their very lives. They had left all to follow Christ. And it has ever been so. To hear amid the murmur of the world's busy life the pleading of the Eternal Love, and to go forth to answer that call without one regretful gaze upon boats, and nets, and a sunlit sea—this is the first great step towards understanding life and towards finding out that the synagogue and the house are one, and that there may be a profound unity and harmony in all the changing hours. The preface to the true philosophy of our own history is one word, and that word is 'obedience.' If life is to have but one meaning it must have but one master : and that Master must be Jesus Christ.

Jesus took His four followers into the synagogue. They had never been present at such a service in all their lives. They knew the synagogue and its service passing well. They had been taken there as boys by their respective fathers, Jonas and Zebedee ; and maybe they had not seldom been hard put to it, not only in those early days, but in more recent times, to keep some semblance of interest in the niggling and

perfunctory homily, full of distinctions without differences, and the glorification of trifles. But that day the Preacher gripped their souls. Deep springs of joy were loosened in their hearts. Such a large, generous, fearless utterance had never before been heard in the synagogue at Capernaum. Law and tradition and ritualism had been preached there for years, and many a weary, wintry time the poor folk had had. But that day a new Preacher had come to Capernaum, and the Preacher's name was Love. And whenever Love preaches, life cannot help listening. Yes, and a poor helpless life was saved that Sabbath morning. The quiet of the service was broken by the cry of a man with an unclean spirit: a most unorthodox proceeding in the light of a more recent evangelistic tradition. There ought to be something to help that man whenever we gather together in public worship. I am afraid some of us forget him. I am afraid we are inclined to assume he is not there. But in the light of a clearer vision of God, a humbler gaze into the face of the sinless Christ, may he not be myself, yourself? Some thread of penitence is woven into all true worship. It will be a sad day when the Christian Church forgets—or when any company of people within its wide borders forgets—that the cry of the man with an unclean spirit has ever been the birth-cry of a new and living worship.

The Synagogue and the House

When Jesus went forth to preach, Judaism had become a religion without vision and enthusiasm, without heroism and moral passion, without sympathy, and so without a message that could get home to the heart of a poor devil-mastered man. Then Jesus came—and the same synagogue could not hold Christ and the devil, and never a stir in the atmosphere. And that remains true when the last word has been said about the psychology of conversion and the subtleties of the modern temperament. I quite believe that a just recognition of the various intellectual and temperamental changes that take place in the common mind and life of men makes for the true furtherance of the gospel. By all means let us acknowledge that we to-day are less introspective, less subjective, in some ways less emotional than our forebears; but all these and kindred considerations do not make us less sinful, nor must we let them challenge or obscure the simple and direct message of divine grace. Perhaps we have heard enough for a while about the things that change. We must reassure and reconvince ourselves of the things that change not—the all-mastering Christ and the sin-laden soul. Modernity is becoming almost a fetish with us. People clamour for an up-to-date gospel. Why, the very plea is a belittling of the gospel! It is the glory and genius of the gospel that it makes nothing

of dates. It is a timeless and eternal power. And it is the power that matters.

Perhaps it is only fair to say a word to those who make a fetish of the bygone. There are some who read that verse, 'And the unclean spirit, tearing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him,' and they refuse to believe that man can find spiritual freedom without being nearly torn to pieces in the finding of it. They cannot believe in a miracle unless they see a disturbance: and, alas, some of them think that having made a disturbance they have worked a miracle. My friends, it matters little what way the unclean spirit goes out of a man's life, but it matters everything that it does go. It matters everything that you and I so pray and believe and worship before God that every man's sin shall cry out within him and be driven forth—and that utterly.

But we must not stay any longer in the synagogue at Capernaum. Let us follow Jesus and His four disciples out again, down the straggling street through the Sabbath sunshine, beneath a cottage doorway. There was a fever-stricken woman in the house. And they tell Him of her. And He took her by the hand and the fever left her. The miracle in the synagogue was followed by the miracle in the house. The cottage on the shore became as wonderful a place as

the temple on the hill. And the lesson of it all is the oneness of life in Jesus Christ.

'When they were come out of the synagogue.' That is just where the difficulty of life comes in for most of us. These four fishermen stood that morning in the place of worship, and the word of Him who spake as never man spake carried them out beyond the fret and triviality, the weariness and sorrow of their lives. But had they gone down alone to their cottage with the fishing-nets drying in the sun, a too familiar sacrament of their hard and perilous struggle for a living, and with the feeble voice of a sick woman unconsciously taking up the tale of the sorrow and frailty of life, they might have felt, as many do feel, that it is a long way from the synagogue to the house. Worship and work might have seemed to them to be in two different worlds. The mercy of the altar might have seemed to have little to do with the sorrow of the hearth.

But Jesus went with them. He had come to teach men the way from the synagogue to the house. The path of His life lay through them both. In Him the gulf between them was for ever bridged and the difference in their final significance for ever blotted out. It is Jesus Christ who has delivered religion from the tyranny of place and time and form. The faith of human hearts has always tended to make too much of places. We trust too easily to some high

and reverent circumstance, and accept too weakly the dictation of some sad or difficult situation. We have our here and our there. I suppose the local always comes before the universal. The only way to the everywhere lies through the somewhere. Doubtless centuries of pious pilgrimage to Gerizim and to Jerusalem did something to prepare men for that great word that at once defined and universalized the place of worship: 'Believe Me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father.' There has to be a synagogue; but the value of it for every man who enters it has always been its nearness and its likeness to the house. The value of religion lies not in its contrast with daily life, but in its communion with daily life. Jesus has made worship something better than a beautiful thing to be with difficulty recalled to help us in life's unlovely places.

We talk about coming to God's house and getting away from the moil and pain of things. And that is part of the value of worship. It does bring, at times, a sense of escape. It does record great hours of the soul. But, better still, it teaches us by the grace of an abiding divine fellowship that the prosaism and unloveliness of life are but the fictions of our blind and unresponsive spirits. We have worshipped as we should when it is easier, and not harder, for us to go

forth and answer the call of life. The synagogue is not the place where a man forgets his work: it is the place where he learns what his work is, and how he best may do it. And, as for sorrow—well, if God lets us forget our sorrow for an hour, it is that we may better understand it when we meet it again, and better bear it for a lifetime. A charming book, a sweet singer will help you to outsoar life; but you finish the last chapter, the last quivering note dies away, and lo! you are still on the wrong side of all life's deepest difficulty. There is a difference between getting up and getting on. There is no profit in being taken out of ourselves, unless we be taken out of ourselves for all and for ever by the strong uplift and unslackening clasp of the Christ who died to save us from all we ought not to be, and liveth to make us all we ought to be, and whose mercy and grace avail in all their fullness for every moment of our lives.

That Sabbath morning in old Capernaum, Jesus made it quite clear why they had a synagogue, a thing that both they who ministered and they who worshipped had forgotten. Capernaum had a synagogue because it had that house where a fever-stricken woman lay weak and restless, and many another house where there were little children and sick folk, and the aged, and anxious mothers and toil-wearied bread-winners. Years of formalism and literalism, and the

gradual substitution of a political for a spiritual outlook, had loosened the bond between the synagogue and the house. It meant little to the perplexed and burdened folk of that busy town that at the turnings of the streets and from the open spaces they could catch a glimpse of the House of Help upon the hill. But, had they but known it, those sad-eyed folk, those sheep without a shepherd, there passed through their streets that day, from the house of prayer to the house of pain, One whose presence in the world meant that never again should religion and daily life stand unrelated or drift apart. He came to make them one; to weave all that is richest in the one into all that is neediest in the other; to make the synagogue a sacrament of help, and the cottage a place of peace, and both part of the great presence-chamber of God's eternal mercy.

'When they were come out of the synagogue they came into the house.' These words stand for life's common and oft-repeated experience. Every day in some wise we have this passage from the synagogue to the house, from the hour of refreshment to the hour of toil, from the place where help is found to the place where help is needed. We have to go forth from our too brief opportunities for devotion, from the Book, from some gracious meditation or some pure and uplifting companionship, from some hour that has at

least made a simple virtue grow great and noble before our inward eye and stand forth in all its kingliness; and we have to strive after that same virtue amid relationships and tasks and aspects of life that conspire to reduce that glorious thing to the level of an unavailing commonplace. We have to turn from the poetry to the prose, from the glory to the drudgery, from the fair ideal to the gloomy actual, from the vision of the glamorous distance to the question of the next step. How we fail, what we lose, what we overlook, what we betray in this continuous conflict between the best and all that seems other and less than the best, probably makes a sad story. And nothing can redeem that story but a clear experience of the oneness of life in Jesus Christ. So searching was His gaze upon life, so profound His sympathy, so catholic His wisdom and love, that for Him life knew no transitions from the higher to the lower, no merely occasional sanctities, no mere secularities. Life was not for Him, as it is too often for us, a thing of shreds and patches, a medley of events, a string of experiences that sometimes brought Him the fragrance of the altar and sometimes the dust of the street. Life for Him was one high obedience, one immortal sacrifice, one solemn, joyous passion of love.

And what life was to Him, He is able to make it to us. Just across the threshold of the sanctuary, just

outside this one hour of quiet, life is waiting for us all. In a few moments we shall be back in it. What does it mean for you? It means that temptation written in your temperament, that truth so hard to speak, that silence so difficult to keep, a wayward child difficult to train, a fretful invalid hard to live with, a froward master, a disappointing servant,—in short for each of us a life-task all too easily misunderstood and mishandled. As we bide here in this hour of worship we call all this 'the other side of life.' Jesus can make it as truly a part of life at its highest and noblest as in some raptured and exalted hour. The Christ of the synagogue is the Christ of the house. What He is to you here, He will be to you there. Life is one in Him—unbroken in meaning, beauty, and worth. Through the straggling narrow streets of life we may pass with His companionship in our hearts, as the four passed through the little town of Capernaum long ago. And ever for us, as for them, the promise and power of the synagogue shall work themselves out, prove themselves true over and over again in all the need and burden of the house.

VII

Mistaken Suppositions

An Easter Sermon

Supposing Him to be the gardener.—John xx. 15.
They supposed that they had seen a spirit.—Luke xxiv. 37.

WHEN Mary Magdalene stood in Joseph's garden on the morning of the Resurrection with embalming spices in her hands and with the tragedy of hopeless love playing itself out in her aching heart, she made a mistake. She mistook the Risen Saviour for the Arimathean's gardener. The mistake is easily explained. The light was still dim. There was just the first faint flush of the dawn, that magical deceptive light, revealing an almost amorphous world. And had the light been better—well, there were tears in the woman's eyes. Yes, and the mistake admits of a somewhat deeper explanation than this.

We see most easily what we are looking for. Expectation is almost part of the power of vision. Mary wanted some one to tell her what had become of the body of Jesus. She wanted some information concerning the empty tomb. She did not exactly want

an explanation. She had explained the situation already. 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.' They had laid Him somewhere. She must not abandon her quest of the still, white form. The last tender offices must be fulfilled. And when a figure loomed in the uncertain light, she came to the simple and likely conclusion that it was Joseph's gardener. Surely here was the very man to tell her what she most wanted to know. 'Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.' Then the figure spoke her name, and in a moment she knew—first of all human souls to know it—that Christ was risen from the dead, and that the hope of the world was splendid, eternal truth.

Now look at another scene. It was the evening of that same day. The darkness had fallen. The disciples were gathered in a house in some narrow street of old Jerusalem. The door was barred with the utmost care. The shutters were closed. Not a gleam of light to attract the notice of a passer-by. For the temper of the Jews was uncertain, and there were not wanting tokens that boded no good to the disciples of the Nazarene. Once already that evening a tremor had passed through that little company. They had heard a careful, stealthy, and yet urgent knocking at the door. It turned out to be two of their

band who earlier in the day had set out to walk to Emmaus. They had a strange tale to tell of One who had joined them on their walk, though, now they came to think of it, they could not say whether He met them or overtook them. They told how His words had made their heart warm with glowing thoughts and burning hopes, of how He had consented to share their evening meal at the little inn at Emmaus, and then—oh the wonder of it!—as the Stranger was blessing and breaking the bread a veil seemed to be taken from before their eyes, and for a few brief moments they saw He was their Master. They saw where the thorns had torn His brow and the nails had pierced His hands—and lo! they two were alone, gazing upon the broken bread, and pondering the burning words. And whilst this story was being told a presence was suddenly manifest to all that listening company. One stood among them whom they had all known and whom they still loved. But in a flash they thought of that final tragedy on Calvary. Death was final, and He had died. They thought, too, of the door so certainly and securely locked, of the windows so firmly barred. And terror seized their spirits. They supposed that they saw a ghost—something unreal, unearthly, a thing of mystery and dread. Till the voice that had revealed the simple truth to the Magdalene in the dawn spoke to them: 'Why are ye

troubled?' and their hearts caught the glorious truth that Christ was risen.

Putting these two incidents side by side, I can see a picture of the twofold difficulty of that new life that Christ came to reveal. I can see, as in a parable, the two ways in which we fail to gather and use the great revelation that Jesus makes to us. We make the mistake that the Magdalene made. We love an easy, earthly explanation of life. We live too often under the dominion of this world's narrow probabilities. We are content, nay, even resolved, that our thought shall move within the cramped limits of our experience. We pass unmoved, unenlightened through some hour that might have been a great hour of the soul, because, for us, life is pre-judged. We are so foolishly sure as to what is most likely to happen. We are so blindly unready for the miracle, so stolidly unprepared for the wonder, the vision, the glory, the message, of the life that is life indeed. We trust only our senses, our instincts, our habits of thought, our powers of judgement, the dictates of earthly experience. How often we sum up a situation, we explain an event, when all the while the real facts of the case have lain outside the range of our observation! An explanation may be perfectly reasonable and quite wrong. What more reasonable than to suppose that that figure in the garden was the gar-

dener? Who else was likely to be there at that early hour? Who else was likely to have any right or business there? The sanity, the likeliness of Mary's conclusion were beyond criticism. But she was wrong. She was tremendously and profoundly wrong. And her mistake teaches us that the truth as it is in Jesus may give the lie to all time-born probabilities. It may contradict earth's narrow, hour-long likelihood. The empty sepulchre is not an isolated marvel. It is not just a splendid, lonely mystery, challenging for evermore the mind that must still live on in a world wholly governed by laws that are traceable and wholly made up of situations that admit of being reasoned out.

That empty sepulchre has filled the round world with mystery. It has enlarged beyond the range of our reason the possibilities of human life. It has run the line of wonder through all the hours. It has made faith and love and worship and spiritual obedience chief factors in each day's reckonings.

Now we know that the simplest facts of life, its toils and its leisure, its wayside greetings, its laughter and its tears are beyond our earthly understanding. We can so easily misinterpret them, so habitually mishandle them. They ask of us a faith that shall reveal the wondrous presence and sovereign will of Christ our Saviour.

Mistaken Suppositions

In the earthliness of our minds we suppose so many shallow and foolish things. We suppose it was an accident; we suppose it was a failure; we suppose it made no difference; we suppose it was just a business transaction, a greeting, a disappointment; we suppose it was just the gift of a friend, sympathy of a neighbour, the music of a song, the word of a book; we suppose it was just a thought the sunset brought us, a sickness from which we recovered—thanks to the doctor—the sweet prattle of a little child. Thus we move in the dim light of the garden and see only the gardener. Thus we ask our questions, follow our plans, do our work, and bear our sorrow, unconscious of that Divine Saviour whose presence and power and love fill all things.

Let us look for a few moments at what happened on the evening of the first day of the week. The mistake that the disciples made in the evening was just the opposite of the mistake that the Magdalene had made in the dawn. She had stumbled over the likely and the familiar: they stumbled over the unlikely and the strange. She had found an explanation that was simple and reasonable and by no means disconcerting. They found an explanation that was irrational, disquieting, and remote from the facts and laws of life. To her, Christ was the gardener about to begin his day's work: to them He

was an inexplicable and dreadful apparition, a ghostly presence from the place of silence and shadows, flinging about their souls the garment of nameless fear. Mary did not go far enough in her explanation of the figure in the garden. She stopped short at the bidding of her habit of thought. She accepted too easily the verdict of sense and judgement. The disciples in their explanation of the figure that appeared among them went too far. They passed beyond the range of all that to them had ever been real and intelligible. They saw only a ghostly visitant, an abstraction, a terrifying mystery. Can we find in that stupefied and fear-stricken company a lesson we need to learn? Is it not the reality of the unseen world, the real existence, the immediate and practical significance of the things of the spirit? We lock the door, we bar the windows of the house of life. We shelter ourselves amid the securities and fellowships of earth. But in spite of every bolt and bar He comes. Conscience beholds a vision of judgement. The sinful soul has vision of the hands its sins have pierced. The human heart in its weariness and longing beholds the outstretched arms of divine pity, and the pain-marred face of Eternal Love. But all the earthliness within us rises to cast doubt on the reality and worth of that vision. We bid this busy outward life belittle such experience. We sometimes treat the deepest thoughts that ever

come to us as mere ghosts of the mind ; the most vital and momentous moods as mere tricks of feeling. We are afraid of silence, of loneliness, of meditation, of the profundities of worship ; of the hour of the hushed thought, the listening heart. We shrink from the tremendous, the sacred and eternal realities of the spirit. We spread the fan of a light shallow realism that we may waft away, as so many gruesome and meaningless ghosts, the thoughts and visions that come to us from the home of all reality. Our fear of the tremendous spiritual realities is not always manifest. It is often well concealed. But beneath many a specious argument, many a robust determination, many a plunge into what men call practical things, there lurks, as the hidden motive, the fear of coming face to face with the true eternal world of the spirit.

It was the same figure that Mary mistook for the gardener and that the disciples mistook for a dread apparition. It was the same living, loving Saviour of human souls. In Jesus the two worlds meet. In Him the earthly and the heavenly are reconciled. That new life that we are called to live through faith in Him can make the familiar things of life flash out with wondrous divine beauty and meaning, and can make the deep and awesome solemnities of the spiritual world brighten with gracious hopes and

comforting promises. For him who gives heart and life into Christ's keeping each well-conned, drudgery-garbed duty rises to its height and worth in the kingdom of righteousness, and through the dim mysterious thoughts of destiny and eternity that shadow the soul we can see the tender face and outstretched hands of perfect love.

Just one other thought. To the Magdalene who had mistaken Him for the gardener Jesus said, 'Touch Me not.' To the disciples who had mistaken Him for a ghostly visitant, an unreality, Jesus said, 'Handle Me and see—for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye behold Me having.'

On the Magdalene Jesus laid a new law of reverence, on the disciples a new law of familiarity. And does not the Risen Christ this day lay those laws upon us? Sometimes we handle life with too much familiarity. We hold our tasks, our opportunities, our privileges, and our hopes with an almost irreverent assurance. So soon for us the glory of life fades into the light of common day. So indifferently the privileges of life come to be handled. We can even tread the path of prayer without awe, and certainly we often face the work and fellowship of life as things of small account. And in so far as it is so with us the Risen Christ says to us, as to the over-eager Magdalene, 'Touch Me not.'

Mary thought that things were just as they had been before. She did not realize the tremendous spiritual meaning of the Resurrection. She did not realize that now Christ's bodily presence was but a sacrament of His abiding spiritual presence in all believing hearts. She would have been content to have kissed the Master's feet. But that was to be too easily satisfied. She had to apprehend Him and to love Him in a higher and a holier way. So would Jesus give us each to pass through life with a new diffidence, a new reverence, a new and holy vision of all familiar things.

And sometimes we do not get near enough to life. We dare not come at close grips with the splendid hopes and the noble visions God in His mercy sends to our struggling souls. They are vague, remote, uncomforting. And when it is so with us, then comes that other word, spoken to the trembling, vision-haunted disciples, 'Handle Me and see.' Put each great thought, each dazzling hope, each wondrous vision to the test here in the maze and sorrow of the years, here in the press of human things. And that same fellowship with Christ that has made each passing duty a thing of immortal worth shall make the vast eternal truth of God a thing of immediate comfort.

VIII

A New Year Sermon

I must also see Rome.—ACTS xix. 21.
For to me to live is Christ.—PHIL. i. 21.

'I MUST also see Rome.' That was no passing desire on the part of St. Paul. Those five words sum up one of the great persistent hopes of the apostle's heart. In his letter to the Christian Church in Rome we find this phrase, 'Having these many years a longing to come unto you.' The presence and growth of such a desire as this is easily accounted for. St. Paul was a Roman citizen, at a time when the Roman empire was the greatest power in the earth and Rome was the capital of the world. Few things were of more practical service to St. Paul than his Roman citizenship. He travelled far and wide, often by those grand straight roads that the Romans had a genius for making; and wherever in his travels he met a representative of the imperial city, the citizen Paul knew that he was likely to find that rough and yet in many respects satisfactory justice which was the secret of Rome's power and the salt of her

life. Rome ruled her world with a strong grip and a magnificent energy. And doubtless St. Paul, more than once, had reason to be glad that this was so.

True, Rome failed this freeborn son of hers sometimes. She chastised and imprisoned this her greatest citizen. In the end she put him to death. But the fact still remains that St. Paul's citizenship stood him in good stead as he went about preaching and teaching throughout that great empire. Providence sometimes came to him in the form of a Roman officer, and he may well have felt that he would like to see the capital from which this availing justice radiated so far.

But there were other and weightier reasons why St. Paul's heart went out to Rome. His experience had taught him the wisdom of getting to the great centres of Roman life and rule. With his intense zeal for the spread of the gospel, with his keen eye for life's most true and spacious opportunities, with his splendid courage that faced simply and gladly the perils of the faith, the apostle felt that if only he could gain a foothold in the metropolis of the world, if only he could touch the heart of the empire, he would have handled the largest opportunity for service that ever man held. He had heard much, too, of the Christian community in Rome as he sat and toiled in the workshop of Aquila, and year by year the desire to

preach there grew upon him. And year by year it was denied him. Ephesus in pro-consular Asia, Athens and Corinth across the Aegean, witnessed his abundant labours. He traversed the country from Syria to Macedonia. He could say in that Roman letter from which I have already quoted, 'So that from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.' But Rome was the dream of his life. And the years of splendid patience and heroic toil rolled on, and the man's hair turned grey, and maybe he thought that the call to the City of the Seven Hills would never come. But it did. And oh, the pathos of it! He entered the city a prisoner in charge of a centurion. He dwelt there two years before he was tried and evidently acquitted of the charges against him. Then after two or three years of liberty, Rome seized him again. This time her temper had changed. St. Paul was held in a closer captivity, very likely denied a glimpse of the blue sky, till the heedless cruelty of Nero sent this brave soldier of Christ to the glorious shame of martyrdom. That was how St. Paul saw Rome. And here and now, on the threshold of the year, I want to help you to bring the desire of your life to the judgement of this noble story.

Every life has its secret hope, its hidden desire. Our work lies, so to speak, in the provinces of life, but

our heart often goes out to the capital. Life is not fully expressed for any of us in the routine of our service. It is not measured by the inch-tape of experience. It is larger than these things. It has room for the unrealized. And if we should be very frank with ourselves and each other, we should confess that one of the inspirations and comforts of life for us, especially as we most feel the limitation and difficulty and irksomeness and prosaism of it, is the whisper to our own heart, 'I must also see Rome.' And the first thing I want you to let St. Paul teach you is this, that only the religion of Jesus Christ can make your dream of Rome worth dreaming. 'I must also see Rome': my friend, what do you mean by that? Some people's Rome is not very far away, not very difficult to reach, and not worth the pilgrimage. Rome was the city of a thousand pleasures, where life could become a whirl of new sensations, and the hours were full of colour and sound and change. Rome was the world's great market-place: its streets, like the streets of all the world's great cities, were paved with gold—for the men who had never trodden them. Rome was the place where a man stood the best chance of honour and office, of promotion and reward. And it was the immensely wealthy and sometimes lavish patron of art and poetry and literature. To the man with a drab experience, or an empty purse, or a disappointed

ambition, or a bundle of poems, the solution of life lay in the words, 'I must see Rome.' If the city of your dreams is a city of gaiety or of wealth or of purely personal selfish advancement, then the secret desire of your life is not worthy the heart that holds it.

But you may say, 'Surely as long as I do my duty nothing else matters. My time, and my strength, and my resources may belong to others, but my dreams are my own.' That is a very common fiction of the mind, a conception of life that too often is made to justify empty, idle speculation, unfounded forecast of the future that breeds unfaithfulness in the present. It is true that your dreams are your own: and it is just because they are your own, woven of the very texture of your mind, vitalized by the inner spirit of your life, that they matter so much. A dream is a radical, creative, germinal thing. It does not float as a pleasing nimbus beyond the range and reckonings of our daily activities. It lies at the core of them. It is true that if you do your duty, nothing else matters; but that is because everything in your life, your dream and desire, your affection and hope, your aim and your character all go to the doing of your duty. We make the mistake of trying to isolate some things in our lives. We cannot do this. Life is one. We cannot dream for ourselves and live for

others. We cannot give the world some of our hopes and give God all our service. St. Paul's dream of Rome was bound to have some effect on all that he said and did. And the reason why it did not cloud his outlook or impair his service is found in those few words in his Philippian letter that give us a glimpse of the very innermost of his soul—'For me to live is Christ.' It is true that our ideal has a great deal to do with our conduct, and just as true that our conduct reacts on our ideal; but there is something in the Christian religion so deep that by comparison both these considerations seem to be but on the surface of things. Christianity's great offer to the world is not a splendid ideal, neither is it a perfect ethic; it is a cleansed heart, an inspired will, a sure and certain hope, a new life. To understand how St. Paul entered Rome you must remember how Saul of Tarsus entered Damascus. 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' The eternal love of Christ broke this man's heart, and all his selfishness was slain, and all his masterful wilfulness was transmuted into tender, willing obedience. Thereafter one face shone through his dreams, one voice spake in his duties; it was the face and voice of the Saviour of the world. When once a man gives himself thus to Jesus Christ everything in his life, from his farthest dream to his nearest duty, rights itself.

A New Year Sermon

See how it was with St. Paul. The thought of Rome never made him indifferent to the claims of Ephesus or Lystra or many another place where he stayed and toiled. His longing to see Rome was eclipsed by his longing to see the kingdom of God coming; even as God willed it should come. He hid this hope in his heart, but he never tried to force the fulfilment of it in his life. He knew that the best place for a man is where God puts him. The vision of Rome sometimes makes men impatient and slovenly in their work. The hope for to-morrow obscures the beautiful and noble duty of to-day. Only Christ can teach us to sacrifice at the altar of patience. Only He can give us that which more than anything else we should desire for ourselves, that is, the willingness to do the will of God here and now. In the Christian life the highest desires keep us faithful to the lowliest duties, and in that faithfulness lies the work of all our days. As you look at St. Paul's life you can learn that a man fails not when his hope is unfulfilled, but when his work is undone. Look at the apostle, passing along the Appian Way and beneath the shadow of the splendid Porta Capena—at last in the city of his desire. He was an old man; the tale of his years was nearly told, and the night when no man can work was already casting its long grey shadows on his path. But what of that? His desire had long

been refused him, but his work had been done. He had never relinquished his dream, but he had never neglected his duty. God had given him to live a life of incomparable value and superb success ere ever his eyes sighted the city that had so often captured his imagination and stimulated his desire.

The best possibilities of our lives are perhaps bound up in our dreams, but they are set free in our deeds. They come to us in God's will for our daily life, and finding that is finding them. Obedience is success. If St. Paul had fought for his heart's desire we dare not think of how tragic and miserable the result would have been. And God honoured His servant's submission by giving him to live a life that in the matter of service has no parallel. We cannot aim too high; but we must have the right standard of measurement. We must know that no man can find anything higher than the will of God for him here and now; and doing that, and rising hour by hour to that, he shall come to know that one day in the place where God has put him is worth a lifetime in the city of his dreams.

A word or two about the way St. Paul reached Rome. He came there a prisoner. And never were chains more suggestive than those he wore. They speak to us of the way the great opportunities of life come to men. To find the freedom of life's

large and abundant fulfilment a man must become the prisoner of the Lord. The highest service has ever been given, not to those who have clutched at a crown, but to those who have been willing to wear fetters. Between each of us and the best we hope to be and do, there lies much submission and much renunciation. Never forget that.

There are a great many disappointed and embittered people in the world — people who are looking back and wondering whether life has been worth while. So much failure and emptiness, so many thwarted endeavours, so many frustrated hours; and the Rome of their heart's desire farther away than ever it was. Yes, and there are some rich men, famous men, successful men, who have entered the Rome of their youthful dreams to find that there is no joy in its honours, no wisdom in its books, no wealth in its markets, and no peace in its streets. And all of them, the disappointed who have never found the city, and the disenchanted who, passing beneath its gate have found it a city of mean streets, have made the same mistake—the mistake from which only Christ can save us. They have forgotten that the law of success is the law of sacrifice; that though desire may often be far off, duty is ever near; that the only life in the end unanswered is the life that is daily unfaithful; and that the only way any man comes to

his own is by living for others. Many a young man in the glamour of his morning time, many a general in the flush of his successful campaign, passed through the gates of Rome ; but the joy they found and the fame they won are forgotten. But still the world remembers one who after years of selfless toil passed beneath the Porta Capena with this thought in his heart and the fruit of it in his life, 'for me to live is Christ.'

> Yea, thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning
> He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed ;
> Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning :
> Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.

Live to Him in this New Year and in all the years, and for you there shall be no conflict between your fairest dream and your most urgent and uninviting task.

IX

The Open Window

Now his windows were open in his chamber towards Jerusalem.—DAN. vi. 10.

IT is not easy to know where to begin the story of this man whose windows were open towards Jerusalem. Those open windows are so eloquent. They have such a tale to tell. It is a beautiful, brave, pathetic story, worthy its place in this Book that records the purest heroisms, and the most lustrous fidelities, and the holiest patiences of history.

Those open windows were on the western frontage of one of the largest houses in Babylon. The man who occupied it stood next to the king in authority and influence. He was one of three presidents who shared between them the highest official dignity of the Assyrian empire, and already it was whispered in the city that the king had a mind to set him still higher, giving him honour and power beyond the other two.

Now when you remember that the palmy days of

the Babylonian rule were not yet passed away, and remember, too, what mighty architects and artists these Assyrians were, it is easy to believe that Babylon's Downing Street was a street of palaces, and that this man we are going to talk about was grandly housed. The suite of rooms he used was on the west front, and the room which we should call his living-room, and which as a child I always thought of as his bedroom, always had its lattices thrown open. 'Well,' you say, 'and what of that? He loved the sunshine and the fresh air, and the view across the Euphrates valley, like many another man in Babylon.' I think he did: but that does not tell the true story of these open windows. The man who looked out through them was a Jew, away from the land of his people and the temple of his God. There was all the pathos of exile in that far gaze. Babylon could never be to this man what Jerusalem must ever be. It had given to him those things that are much to many men and all to some—place, power, and learning, but it was not rich enough to give him a home. He loved the meanest street in the city of his people better than all the stately palaces of Babylon. He never lost the sense of strangeness in that heathen capital. It could not minister to the few elemental needs of his life. And when he felt most keenly the loneliness of his exile, he did not

seek the busy thoroughfares of the city, nor the glittering distinctions of the court; he went to his house and looked out of some western window, and said to himself, 'Somewhere beyond those hills there lies Jerusalem.' It was five hundred miles away as the crow flies, but it was nearer to him than Babylon lying at his feet; for, after all, my friends, near and far, are not measured by miles. They are to be reckoned according to the linear measure of love. There is a mensuration of the heart.

This thought brings us to the timelessness of the history. It is the heart's story, fresh as the morning light. Do not men call the world Babylon, and do they not speak of another city—the new Jerusalem, and say

> My treasure and my heart are there?

If that is so, is there such a thing as the home-sickness of the soul? I am afraid that the thoughts that the phrase suggests are not so wholesome and dignified as one would wish them to be. This home-sickness is a grand thing if you have really got it. The visions of the seers, and the patiences of the saints, and the lonely toils of the faithful, are bound up with it. But sometimes the world hears a man singing—

I'm but a stranger here:
Heaven is my home.

And it nudges its neighbour, and says, 'He seems to have settled down very comfortably for a stranger.' It is convinced that some of these 'strangers here' are in a fair way of becoming naturalized. And so they are. They are like those Jews who had such a flourishing time in Babylon that they lost all desire to see Jerusalem again. Their success in the market killed their patriotism. Mind that your success doesn't kill yours!

There is a sure way to tell whether it is still alive in your heart. To every man to whom the heavenly city is more than a name and the immediate presence of God is more than a phrase, there come times when the busy world about him seems unsatisfying, and he knows himself one with them of old, 'who confessed that they were strangers on the earth.' Then he must needs get him to life's western window, and look out across the low-lying hills of time and circumstance, and say to his own heart, 'Somewhere beyond those hills there is my soul's native land, my abiding city, my Father's face.'

Those are not vain hours that a man spends at the open lattice of his heavenly hope. See what the open window did for Daniel. In the city of a thousand spurious divinities, it reminded him of a temple

erected for the worship of the One God. In the city full of fascinating lures and shameless enticements, it brought home to his heart every day the sweet, stern morality of the Hebrew ethical ideal.

The breath from that open window kept his life clean. But for it he might have been drawn into the dark current of Babylonian sensuality and sinfulness. He might have become unwilling, unworthy, unable to utter in the ears of Babylon the words of his God. But the open window taught him that Babylon was a terrible place. He saw a sinister shadow in its smiles, he heard the whisper of danger in its plaudits; and three times a day he knelt with his face towards the holy city, and his heart going out unto his God: never too busy or tired for that.

My friends, we who live in Babylon cannot afford to spend all our time in its streets amid the traffic and the merchandise, the gains and the greetings, the weariness and the sin. If life's western window is never opened; if the breath from the hills of God plays in vain around its closed and dust-laden lattice; if morning, noon, and night the vision is the vision of Babylon and the voice is the voice of Babylon, then is the seal of the city set ever more broadly upon a man's forehead and its delusions and its passions make their home in his heart. We say that God is everywhere. But we cannot find Him everywhere if we do not find

Him somewhere. He is near us in the babel of buying and selling, in the toil for bread, in the rush of life. But they who find Him thus in the thick of the world are they who have first found Him waiting for them, as He waited for one of old, at the window that looks towards Jerusalem, to send them forth into the day's life with the temple reverence and the temple ideal impressed afresh upon their spirit. And when the day is over, and Babylon has done its worst, they find Him there again waiting to sweep the last jangling echoes of the city right out of their hearts —that as they lie down to rest their last thought shall be laden with the peace of that other city— Jerusalem beyond the hills.

But to return to Daniel. He proved himself stronger than Babylon. That was because he could see beyond Babylon. The men who conquer the world are the men who see beyond the world. Babylon published an interdict, and it meant for Daniel no communion at his western lattice for thirty days: thirty prayerless days! That was what the interdict said; and after it had been signed and sealed by Darius, it was unalterable. The Medes and Persians prided themselves on never going back on anything they had decreed. Babylon had challenged Jerusalem. It had pitted its powers against the powers of the God of Daniel. 'And when Daniel knew that the writing

was signed, he went into his house (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime.' So much for the law of the Medes and Persians. No, not that. So much for the law of the open window, and the reverent heart, and the soul's faithfulness. Babylon had a law that altered not. So had Daniel. He was not a Babylonian. He lived under the law of another city, and he obeyed that law, and it cast him into a den of lions, and it brought him out again and made him a splendid witness for God. My friends, history tells us that, whenever the heavenly unalterable and the earthly unalterable have met, one has always had to alter, and it has not been the heavenly one.

Those satraps said to Daniel, 'If we find you on your knees after this, we will be the death of you.' And they had it all down in black and white. They were backed up by something that was never known to give way. And they found him on his knees after that, and they were not the death of him! That ought to put heart into us. Instead of Babylon, read Manchester or London; there is no essential difference. Instead of the law of the Medes and Persians, read the law of the force of circumstances. And now, all you want is some one who will accept the exhortation of a familiar hymn, and 'dare to be a Daniel.' The world is

saying to men in this city of ours, 'If you are absolutely honest, I'll starve you. If you will not obey the law of self-interest, I will wreck your prospects. If you are bent on succeeding as a saint, you shall fail in everything else' (as if there were anything else!).

But all this has a terrible side. It is a very serious matter. If a man for conscience' sake, for Christ's sake, defies the world, there seems to be nothing for it but the den of lions. That appears to be the issue; but it is not. Whenever the world throws a man to the lions, he always falls into the hands of the living God. And whatever happens, he is safe there.

Just see exactly what happened in the case of Daniel. The satraps laid their plans, and developed their conspiracy, and passed their anti-prayer law, and placarded the city with their impious instructions, and spied on Daniel and found him going his own way—or, shall we say, praying his own prayers?—and they tried him and proved the case to the hilt, and cast him into the den of lions, and then God muzzled the lions. Babylon was never more surprised in all its life. It was somewhat of an authority on lions. It had always believed that a lion, especially when judiciously starved, is a very fierce and dangerous animal. It had to learn that a lion is just what God lets him be. When at last Daniel was lowered into the lions' den in the

evening, just about feeding time, Babylon said, 'That's settled.' And so it was. God settled it. And as far as Daniel was concerned, these lions had no teeth and no claws. They could not raise a growl between them.

And that is happening in every city. To more than one doggedly righteous man in this city the world has said, 'Turn aside, or I will fling you to a fierce lion, and his name is Poverty.' And it has flung him there—as any man may see; but he knows that God has said to poverty, 'Thou shalt not bite.' The world has a whole den of lions, whose names are scorn, hate, shame, and loss. And God can say to them all—'Ye shall not tear: ye shall be harmless.' And He says it. The world cannot breed a lion that God cannot tame.

So I commend to you this story of a good man, as a parable of the godly life in an ungodly world. It has been the wonder of the world that many a simple man and many a frail woman has faced its most terrible threats with a strangely joyous peace-light in the eyes. My brother and my sister, you can face the world like that. It is the light of the western window. If you look out of that window you will not be afraid to look into the den of lions—no, nor even to spend a dark night there. Keep your heart open to God and the light of the divine ideal, and let

neither the shadow of Babylon's favour nor of Babylon's fierceness come between you and the Holy City; and God shall bring you out of this great Babylon unharmed, giving always a great peace, and whenever you need it a great deliverance.

X

Hearing for Others

Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.—DEUT. v. 27.

'GO thou near, and hear for us.' That is an old and still abiding plea. It is born of an old and still abiding necessity. It has been the cry of the human heart in all ages in its endeavours to find God and worship Him and learn His will. As we look at Moses standing in the lurid shadow of the mountain that might not be touched, standing and listening in the place of thunder—whilst the people waited afar off not daring to draw nigh, we can see, if we will, not an incident of ancient history about which certain critical minds can grow brilliantly sceptical, but a great fact, too deeply grounded in human experience for any wise soul to doubt it. I mean the ever personal and persistent need for mediation. The real value of history lies not in the nicety with which it records incidents but in the plainness and

force with which it makes the deeds of men exhibit the principles that go to the making or unmaking of the world. Right through the world's religious history we see a long line of lofty souls who have been called to read great saving truths among shadows into which their brethren dare not pass, and to hear some clear plain word of guidance amid the reverberations of wrath and disaster. And if we should be shown, as we are shown, the picture of a people forgetting their own need of the very word they asked for, forgetting the faith and courage of their leader waiting for that word amid the shadows and the thunders, and celebrating the feast of the golden calf, sitting down to eat and drink and rising up to play, this also is twice-told history. Moses is not the only man who has come down from the mount of yearning prayer and unselfish vigil for the souls of men to find, instead of a hungry, humble silence, the revelry of them that feast. And the prophet has always known that the hour of penitence and silence and fear would come again upon the people, and they would listen to his message.

But for full and final proof of the world's need of mediated truth and grace we do not look back along the line of its leaders and its teachers, its priests and prophets. We see One who through shadows darker than even Sinai knew, the shadows of the garden and

the Cross, drew near unto God, passed for our sakes into that fathomless mystery where justice and love are one, and heard for us, and has told us, for our deep and everlasting comfort, all that He heard. Jesus is God's final answer to the long pleading of the world, 'Go near, and hear what the Lord our God shall say: and speak unto us; and we will hear it, and do it.'

But there is another and a different, but yet a very real, sense in which truth is still mediated. God speaks to men through men. We are in this world, all resonant with His voice, to hear not only for ourselves but also for other people. Now hearing for other people suggests a task which some find by no means unpleasant or difficult, indeed a task to which they address themselves with enthusiasm and delight. 'Hearing for other people' sometimes means dodging the truth with a fervent hope that it will hit some one else. It means becoming an expert in so receiving the shafts of rebuke or warning coming straight for your own conscience that they glance harmlessly aside and bury themselves in your neighbour's conscience. It is the subtle art of misapplication. And it is essentially unprofitable. The gains thereof are a heart of pride and a starved soul. There is not one of us but can ill afford to miss one of those life-enriching pains God sends to teachable and listening souls.

What boots it that a man has seen the shame his brother ought to feel, if to see it he himself has turned his back on the everlasting joy and fathomless wisdom of humility and refused the priceless treasure of a broken and a contrite heart?

But there is a way of hearing for other people that is wholly meet and right, and that plays a necessary part in the religious education of the race. Think for a moment of music. It is a mediated treasure. There are a few great names, and we call them the masters. I think we might call them the listeners. They heard for duller ears the choral harmony that is wherever God is. Did the great poets fashion their poems out of their own vibrant and sensitive souls? If we could ask them I think they would say 'No, we heard these things.' The musician and the poet have been men with ears to hear. The music of the *Messiah* was waiting for Handel, the message of the hills and vales of Cumberland was waiting for Wordsworth. And through them he may hear who will.

Now it is just possible that some of you are saying, 'This is a sermon for geniuses.' I should be the last to suggest that even if it were it would be out of place here. We preachers are often told that we never know whom we have got in our congregations. But as a matter of fact I have merely been casting

round for an outstanding and easily grasped illustration of a law of revelation that is by no means confined to these very obvious examples of it. This work of hearing for others is part of the life-task of every man who lives to God. 'Go near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say.' Whenever a man does that, he hears something for his brother as well as for himself. There is an inherent unselfishness in divinity. There is a diffusiveness in every divine message. In this matter of the word of the Lord spoken to the soul, no man liveth to himself. In the measure that any life attains unto sainthood it becomes part of God's revelation of Himself to the world. But you may say, 'Where is the need of such a revelation. If every man can hear for himself, what need that he should hear through another?' Why, the need is here. Every man can, and indeed must, draw near to the place of hearing; but every man does not hear the same thing when he gets there. The voice is the same, but the message is strained through a man's own ears. It is interpreted by each man's experience. There are words that can best be heard amid the murmur of busy life—words heard only of such as sit in the still places of pain. Sorrow hears for gladness, and gladness for sorrow. Wealth hears for poverty, and poverty for wealth. The old man hears for the young man, and the young man hears

for the old man. Every type of temperament and gift and need and experience finds its place in bringing God's meanings home to the heart of the world. His word is written in all godly lives. Mind you, I say, 'godly' lives. Ungodliness never gets near enough to the truth to hear anything worth repeating. It is insignificant and meaningless and messageless. But to the pure and the reverent and the spiritually-minded, Heaven ever grants an audience. 'Go thou near, and hear what the Lord shall speak to us.' That is the privilege and obligation of sanctity.

And it means a different thing in each man's life. The approach is in principle the same for us all, but each comes back with a different message. The wealth of the world lies in men's individuality. Religion takes hold of all the subtle points of difference in our lives—differences of equipment, of standpoint, of experience—and uses them to make more clear to our brethren the great common truths whereby the soul lives. If all men saw alike, no man would see clearly.

Most people consider originality a very desirable thing. Strange to say, however, people often think that the short cut to originality is found by copying some one else. The attempt to be original invariably defeats itself. Yet originality is a very precious thing. It is worth a great deal to the world. And

the one thing that truly develops and safeguards it in human life is the worshipping and the listening spirit. The most original man is the most devout man. The freshest thing any man can give to the world—the one thing the world can never have unless he does give it—is the word of God spoken in his own soul—the transcript of his personal experience of divinity. The hardest task a man can have in this world is to find himself. Indeed no man can make that all-important discovery unless God guides him to it.

We are often reminded that we are creatures of habit. That is good. Habit is the framework of character. But it is sadly possible for a man to be the creature of other men's habits. We all pay an unconscious toll to the great conventions in the midst of which we live out our lives. It is so difficult to live out your own life. But in so far as our desire for originality is born of this imperative sense of the duty of living out our own life from the inmost and unto the uttermost, it is a desire worthy of being cherished; and nowhere more so than in the great matter of religion. William Watson, in a searching criticism of a certain section of society, describes them as having 'minds to one dead likeness blent.' You will not misunderstand me if I find in that description a warning to the members of the noblest

society on earth—the Christian Church. I know there may be minds to one *living* likeness blent. It is much to us that we have so much in common. Faith shared is faith stablished. But we all owe something more to our brother than to hear with him. We must also hear for him. In this continuous communion of believing souls we ought to be richer—and we are—not only by the grace of sympathy, but by that thing in each of us that is first of all ours alone because we are each listening for ourselves to what God has to say to us.

And the word that is given to a man thus is an authoritative word. The children of Israel said to Moses, Tell us what God shall say to you; and we will hear it, and do it. How did they know it would be God's word he would bring back to them, since they would not be present at that awful communion? Whence this readiness of theirs to obey a word not yet spoken? My friends, they knew that in this matter deception was impossible. A man can fashion many deceits, but he cannot speak God's word until he has heard it. It does not take a spiritual expert to detect a sham divinity. There is an instinct in the human heart that can always tell how far a word has travelled. Men can always tell whether your life message is an echo of the temporalities—a word picked up in the valley of time—or whether it has

come through your hearts listening to the voice of the Eternal. There is so much book-writing and speech-making nowadays that one sometimes thinks a day may come when the few distinguished people will be those who have indulged themselves in neither direction. One wonders whether there is not too much talking. Perhaps the truth lies rather in this, that there is not enough listening. The world soon wearies of talk. There are healthy signs of revolt against mere theory-mongers and dealers in irresponsible hearsay. There is a growing appetite for living truth. There is one voice of which the world will never tire, and it is the voice of the Christian experience. Still it says tacitly, if not explicitly, 'Speak unto us all that God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it.' The time will never come when simple, life-deep godliness cannot get a hearing.

And just a word about the order. Hear, and then speak. Do not try to reverse it or you will become one of the great company of babblers. Many of you know that one of the dominant notes in modern life is not so much unbelief as uncertainty. For years past we have been gathering knowledge faster than we can arrange it. The spirit of readjustment is upon us. A great many good souls hardly know what they believe. Do not, I beseech you, be anxious to add your little bit of private speculation to the common

fund of doubt. That fund just now is in a very flourishing condition. Go near and hear what the Lord your God shall say, and you shall have a message to deliver by the living out of your own life : a message some one needs, to which some one will listen, and by which some one shall win the grace of a quiet heart.

XI

The Lord's Song in a Strange Land

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?—Ps. cxxxvii. 4.

WHEN you watch religion at work, you find a morality; when you converse with religion in its thoughtful moods, you find a theology; but whenever you get to the heart of religion you find a song Now that is not another way of saying that if your conduct is right and your creed is right, then you will be happy. Morality may be as cold as ice, and theology may be as dry as dust. But religion stands for something deep and vital: something of which our best deeds are but shadows and our largest creed is but a broken and stammering story. It comes up from the depths of a heart that God has reached and touched, that seeks to reach and touch Him again. The great hymns of the Church come nearer than anything else to uttering the last deep secret of the religious life. They do not contain the raptures of the Christian experience so much as the profundities of the Christian faith. And by that I do not mean that

they are theological. As a matter of fact they are; but a hymn is not theology indulging in a poetic flight. Theology does not approve of such flights. It is not capable of them. It never wrote a hymn, and it never made any one want to sing a hymn—except by way of relief—the hymn being not the outcome of the situation, but rather something brought in to save it. Some people regard our *Methodist Hymn-book* with vast satisfaction because they find so much good theology in our hymns. But you have not said the best that can be said about a hymn when you have lauded its theology. For a hymn takes up the tale of truth at a point nearer its source than ever theology can come, and carries the tale on beyond the point at which theology lays it down. The song of the Church is born of all that is ineffable in its creed, instinctive in its convictions, vital in its morality, basal in its spiritual experience. If the Church is the Bride of Christ, the hymn-book is its love-story.

And now look at that band of captives sitting listlessly by the waters of Babylon, folded in all the pathos of a thwarted destiny and a broken dream. 'How shall we sing the song of Zion?' They might have recited the creed of Zion. They might have borne testimony to the faith of Zion. But to sing the Lord's song. to sing out the glory of their history and destiny, to set the great notes of the

Hebrew faith ringing in alien ears—was for a while too much for them. They broke down, and hung their harps on the willows.

And surely here the story touches our lives. The bitter cry of these few Jewish patriots has ever been the cry of the worshipping heart, with its ideal, its aspiration, its yearning and its duty, as it has sojourned in the strange land, under the dynasty of world-powers, the autocracy of selfishness, the tyranny of temptation, and the imperialism of pain. There is no good man, no man who seeks unto God, who cannot enter in somewise into this story of the song unsung. The song of the heavenly city has always been hard to sing amid the shadows of the earthly exile. But the difficulty proves that the song is there. I think perhaps some people forget that, or doubt it. They think they have parted with their song in the hour when they cannot set it to music. But it is not the song they have laid aside, it is only the harp. We have seen that the song of the Church is not born of ecstasy but of profundity. It dwells amid the deep things that lie at the foundations of faith and that feed the roots of character.

Look again at the Jews, with their harps on the willows. That picture tells you just how much and how little Babylon can do. It can take the harp out of a man's hands, but it cannot pluck the song of the Lord

out of his heart. You can see in that group of grieving folk the outward and visible sign, not of Babylon's triumph, but of its defeat. It tells of a loyalty that that great city could not shake, a dream of home it could not banish, a song of the heart's deep things, that neither the music of its temples nor the roar of its streets could make men forget. My friends, it may be that our very depressions are precious to God. It may be that He can teach us to take heart of hope out of our very sense of the difficulty and pain of the soul's true life. It may be that the burdened silences of earnest hearts, like rests in music, have their rightful place in the song we sing to Him here. Side by side with this word about the harps on the willows and the voices choked with tears set this word—'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.' Israel had never sung like that before; but where had they learned to sing like that? Why, in the only place where a man can learn to sing the Lord's song as it should be sung—in the strange land. The Jews brought back from Babylon not only the memory of a bitter captivity but the art of a sweeter song. One of our latest poets has said, 'The half of music, I have heard men say, is to have grieved.' There is a more or less popular refrain that goes thus—'I feel like singing all the time.' Now if that refrain

sums up a man's experience, whatever he is (and I won't attempt to place him lest I should do him an injustice) he is not a singer and never was a singer and does not know what singing is. William Watson, in a lovely poem to the skylark, says—

> My heart is dashed with griefs and fears;
> My song comes fluttering and is gone.
> O, high above the home of tears,
> Eternal joy, sing on!

A bird's song may be learned above the home of tears, but not a saint's song. We have to learn to sing by not being able to sing. Sorrow is the saints' singing-master—the large unselfish sorrow of a heart loyal to God amid the harsh and alien tongues of the world's wickedness and all the strangeness of the land.

Ah, but, you say, the question we started with was not, 'How can we learn the Lord's song in a strange land?' but 'How can we sing it there?' My friends, there is a sense in which the learning and the singing are one. The Lord's song is not first of all the song of the man who feels happy; it is the song of the man who does right. We have seen how deep the song goes. It is our first duty to be true to the depths of it. Look at these Jewish exiles again. How did they find an answer to their own question? They

hung their harps on the willows, but their obedience was unto God. Every Jew who kept his hands clean and his heart hopeful in that unholy and masterful capital sang the Lord's song. If it did not fall on Babylon's ears it rang in Babylon's conscience. When Daniel made his choice between unfaithfulness and life or faithfulness and death; and when three young princes stood upright and strong, in the flush of their youth, and the power of their faith, amid the crowd that bowed itself on the plain of Dura, refusing to betray their lives' most precious trust and to dishonour the God of their fathers, and their God—the Lord's song went up to heaven from the land of strangers. It is the song of moral victory, and of utter faithfulness to God's voice in the soul. That is not the only note in the song. But if that note be missing there is no song.

And that is one of the notes that is threatened to-day—the great note of moral freedom. Vachell says in one of his books: 'A bird in the hand never sings.' The inner life of so many people to-day is like a bird in the hand, and the hand is the hand of fatalism. Side by side with that great movement, in the main towards liberty, that is associated with the word 'democracy,' there has gone on for the last fifty years another movement that has made men doubt the highest forms of the very liberty they have

fought for. The gospel of environment has been preached. Science has upheld the monarchy of law, and materialistic philosophy has wrongly construed that monarchy in the terms of the tyranny of circumstance. It has said that the land is the sole maker of them that dwell in it. It has taken the Master's question, 'Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto his stature?' and has deduced from it, not a faith in Almighty God, but a complete capitulation to Giant Circumstance. Now there is at the heart of religion a flaming denial of that suggestion. And I say that to fling down the gauntlet at the feet of the modern determinism that is doing so much just now to weaken for men the springs of action and to discount for them the value of moral effort, to prove through every hour of your own life that the captive of circumstance is the free man of the Lord—this is to set the note of the Lord's song floating through the streets of the city, and to put new life into some struggling and despairing souls.

But there is another side to this question about the Lord's song and the singing of it that must not be overlooked. In what sense is the Lord's song the song of happiness? There are a great many religious people in the world to-day who are not really happy. The causes of their want of happiness may be very diverse, but probably it is due in many cases to the

false idea of the function of happiness. 'Be good and you will be happy,' is an exhortation that is not true for any man till he has forgotten it, and not always true even then. If a man looks on happiness as a sort of lawful interest that ought to be coming in to him from his investments of fidelity and sacrifice he is making a great mistake. The desire to be happy frustrates itself. Happiness as a test of character, or even as a test of religious sincerity, is best ruled out of our reckonings. It is only calculated to cloud our inner life and enfeeble our moral endeavour. And we may get wrong in the great harmony of life by being too anxious about the melody. But if a man should succeed in doing this, the question of happiness faces him again when he looks into his brother's eyes. He may not seek it for its own sake, but he cannot help seeking it for the world's sake and his work's sake.

Do we not feel that we owe it to the world to be happy? When we are told that we ought to go about with bright faces and be beams of sunshine, do we not feel that there is something sound and vital in that demand? When we read these lines of Robert Louis Stevenson—

> If I have faltered more or less
> In my great task of happiness,
> If I have moved among my race
> And shown no glorious morning face,

do we not feel that part of our personal failure in the service of God is being probed? True happiness is the most persuasive herald the gospel can send forth into the world. The creed that will win the day in the end will be the creed that can be sung. We must learn to set it to the music of joy.

A strange sadness has come over modern religious life. Probably the spirit of sadness that has crept into our music, and also, though in a less degree, into our literature, has tinged our religious thought. But I think that much of it is due to the fact that in emphasizing the ethical issues of the Christian faith we have almost unconsciously linked our joys too closely with our duties, instead of looking straight up to God. The Lord's song has become a song of defiance hurled at the world, instead of a song of faith for the ear of Heaven. The true music of the Lord's song rings not in the hearts of the morally desperate, but in the hearts of the spiritually exultant. The true joy of the Christian is not that of a servant working for the love of his work; it is the joy of a son working for love of his Father. It is not the joy of a fighter with his back to the wall; it is the joy of a fighter with his face to the skies. Joy is not the child of obligation fulfilled; it is the child of affection and aspiration satisfied. I quoted Watson's line just now—

O, high above the home of tears.

After all, that is where the true joy of life dwells for us all. And to reach up to that we need something more than the sure hands of faithfulness—we need the strong wings of faith. The song that comes out of service is much; but oh for the song of the Lord out of which service comes!

I believe that if a census were taken to discover the five most popular hymns to-day, among the five you would find, 'Lead, kindly light; amid the encircling gloom.' I confess to a weakness for that hymn myself. But if the early Methodist fathers had had that hymn, they would have never given it out. This is what they sang!—

My God, I am Thine!
What a comfort divine!
What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!
In the heavenly Lamb
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart it doth dance at the sound of His name.

That was not the product of a temperament, neither was it the effervescence of an evangelical revival. That has been the true joy-note through all the ages. I do not know whether we shall ever come back to that hymn of Charles Wesley's; but we shall have to come back to the experience if ever hillside and city are to ring with the song of the Lord.

I do not say the song is not sung now. It is; but

it has been transposed. It is sung in four flats instead of five sharps. And when you change the key of a song you change the message of the song. Let us never forget that the authentic song of the Lord throbs with joy. And it is not when a man has tried to do his best down here, but when faith and hope have lifted him and all his travail and success and weariness and failure right up to God's eternal power and love, that he can sing that song.

Then, to turn for a third time to the poet's lines to the singing bird, and venturing this time to alter them, a man can sing—

> My heart is dashed with griefs and fears,
> My song comes fluttering and is gone;
> Yet here, within this home of tears,
> Eternal joy, sing on!

XII

Twilight and Trembling

The twilight that I desired hath been turned into trembling unto me.
—Isa. xxi. 4 (R.V.).

YOU all know that the twilight is a great wizard. I do not know whether you have ever thought to analyse its subtle power. If you have, I think you will have found that the spell of the twilight lies quite as much in what it hides from us as in what it reveals. It casts a filmy veil of indistinctness over all things we see—softening their hardness, dealing gently with their defects, making such beauty as they possess more suggestive and idealistic.

The twilight hour is the one merciful hour in the day—the hour when there is just enough light to see by, but when criticism has to be suspended. This hour, one feels, is in the beautiful fitness of things. There is a sense in which the whole span of our human life is but the twilight hour that ushers in the bright eternal day. God has set a merciful limit to our seeing. Part of that limitation is in our spiritual

constitution, part is in our circumstances. Just as there is an automatic contraction of the pupil of the eye so as to admit only just so much light as the exquisite mechanism of sight can effectively and safely deal with, so there is also a similar law of limitation that concerns the inward eye. We see as much as our minds can grapple with and our hearts can bear. One somehow feels that if only one could see now as one will see some day, life would appear at once more beautiful and more unsightly than ever one has yet conceived it to be. We have never seen life as gracious and noble and fair as it really is ; but, on the other hand, we have never seen it as sordid and twisted and deformed as it really is. If the twilight hour of our mortality fails to show us the splendour of life's best beauty, it is equally reticent about its worst deformity. If it seems to cheat us out of some of our enjoyment of the fair things, it spares us the pain of realizing the full measure of earthly defect. Amid the miseries of imperfect life there is the mercy of imperfect vision. And I think we should be very glad that this is so. No man might know all that sin means, and live. The vision would break his heart. The God-man who came from the eternal sunshine, and dwelt awhile in the earthly twilight, had that vision of sin ; and it made for Him the black anguish of Gethsemane.

So, I say, there is a twilight that God giveth, that God willeth—a merciful limitation of light. But this is not the twilight of which the prophet speaks. There is a twilight not of God's willing but of man's desiring, that brings the spirit of trembling into men's lives. It is this that I want you to consider just now. 'The twilight that I desired.' Here is the picture of a man who is afraid to look life in the face; who does not want to see things as they are. He wants to limit his own vision—to see things less plainly. He is seized with a desire to shirk the responsibilities and pains of life's larger knowledge. He is desirous for the moment of laying aside his powers of insight and discrimination and delicate judgement and keen appreciation of life's ever changing situation. He is willing to forgo the power of introspection.

I think we all of us have to face hours like this: hours when we wish that a merciful blindness might fall on our inward eye. Now, these are hours when we need to pray for a special anointing of courage and sincerity and faith. As I have just tried to show you, there is a limit of vision; but it is God's matter, and not yours and mine, as to where that limit shall be set. We may not be able to see much, but we are bound to see all that we can. One of the most persistent temptations with which we have to deal is the temptation to shut our eyes to the things God

means us to see—to try to make twilight for ourselves. It is the instinct of self-preservation gone astray.

We all have an instinctive shrinking from the sight of anything painful and dreadful. I remember some years ago being the unfortunate spectator—shall I say?—of a serious accident. The thing happened before my eyes. My first desire was to shut them. It was the instinctive desire to avoid the sight of suffering. But as I was the only person who for the moment was in a position to render assistance, I knew there was something else to do than that, unless I wanted to burden the rest of my days with the memory of a mean moment. Please understand there was no personal risk involved in the matter—it was simply a brief struggle with a natural desire to spare my senses.

Now, that is a struggle that in a higher sense we have to wage every day of our lives. The awful drama of pain and misery is being played out before our very eyes. We live in a suffering world. The outlook at times is unutterably pathetic, tragic, and saddening; and I am afraid that so long as these things do not cut their way into our own lives we try to ignore them, to live as if they were not.

I dare say we think we can justify such procedure. There is something to be said about the spirit of cheerfulness, and looking on the bright side. But

there is this other side, without a spark of brightness; and part of God's revelation is waiting you there, and part of your work is waiting there too. If you shut your eyes to as much of men's sadness and necessity as you can; if you consistently try to forget that every day our brethren are grappling with all sorts of hard things—grief and poverty and disease; if you refuse to let the holy mystery of other men's pains come into your heart, you may find a shallow comfort to-day, but in the harvest of your years you will have to bind the sheaves of a trembling shame. I say it is not for nothing that we live in a world where every day some hear the call that may not be gainsaid—the call to suffering. God forgive us if in the days when that call has not come to us we have striven to put out of our mind all remembrance of them who have gone forth unto the fields of pain to bear a stricken body or a bruised heart, or to lose for a space all memory of the sunshine as they stoop to dig a grave.

The secret of quiet confidence in a world that furnishes us with the sight of so many sad things does not lie in shutting our eyes. That is the expedient of the cowardly and the faithless. It lies in looking at things as they are, and letting the sad vision force us back upon the mercy and power of God. If only we have the courage and faith to look into these

things that pain the heart and try the spirit and lay rough hands on life's sensitiveness, we shall learn more of the patience and tenderness of God than ever gladness alone could have taught us; and we shall find awaiting us among these things a ministry of help in the offering of which God shall perfect our hearts in the knowledge of Himself and the love of the brethren.

But again, it is sometimes our own life that we would carry into the twilight. We cannot bear the reproach of our own hearts, we cannot gaze steadfastly at the unsightliness of our own character. We would that the twilight shadow might fall softly upon our self-consciousness, that we might not see ourselves as we are. My friends, if you would know anything of life's lasting quietness, then do not try to carry your heart's sinfulness out of the light of God's face. There are no hours that have richer moral value, no hours that if rightly used will produce a richer harvest of strength and confidence, than those hours of insight into the faultiness and manifold imperfection of our own life, when, as it were, God gives us stereoscopic vision of our own sinfulness. I know they are bitter, shameful hours. One's self-respect is reduced to the vanishing-point. At such times we grow sick of ourselves, and may be very despondent about ever building a strong character and fulfilling a pure service. But,

I say again, they are among the most precious hours of life—if we find the right solution of them.

There are two solutions. The one which in all probability first suggests itself to us is this escape into the shadows. The desire for twilight comes upon us. We want to get somewhere where moral judgements are softened down, and where selfishness looks less ugly, and where a man may wrap a tissue of excuses round a wrong thing. Yielding to this desire, a man passes out of the searchlight of truth into the shadow of self-deception. Immediately he begins to think better of himself. Some of his self-respect seems to be restored. But that is not the end of the story.

'The twilight that I desired hath been turned into trembling unto me.' The man who shuns the light forfeits his own final peace of heart. He who refuses to face his worst forfeits the possibility of finding his best. He does not solve the question of his sinfulness; he shelves it. It is there, gathering darker meaning and more bitter consequence. Every day twilight and trembling go together. You cannot build the house of peace on the foundation of self-deceit. Darkness hides wrong, but it does not alter it. There is no salvation among the shadows of moral delusion. There is no quietness in uncertainty. There are some who deliberately refuse to

look at their own spiritual position—their relation to God the Saviour and the kingdom of peace and the promise of life—lest they should find it unsatisfactory. They live their lives in the vague hope that things will be well with them by-and-by. They do not desire anything more illuminating than the twilight of a hopeful speculation. That is, at the best, but an indefinite postponement of the day of trembling.

Perhaps your life has carried you into the twilight. You are not really happy. You have tried the wrong solution of the problem of your own sinfulness. Won't you try the alternative? You know what it is: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' In all things that touch the soul it is better to see than not to see. Better to tremble to-day than to-morrow, for to-day there is mercy for them that tremble. If a man will consent to face his own heart here and now, with all its depths of foolishness and shadows of passion and sin, he shall have nothing worse to face. The light that shows him the greatness of his sin shall show him also the greatness of his salvation. 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is

faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

So, I say, God help us to face the light that reveals to us the sorrows of humanity and the sins of our own souls; for only so can we ever come to learn that there is a greater word than sorrow, and that word is love. There is comfort for a world of sorrow, and mercy for a world of sin, in the heart of God.

XIII

Heroism

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, and brought it to David.—2 SAM. xxiii. 15–16.

MORE than one beautiful thing rises before the inward eye as this story is told. There is the picture of a man amid the dust and peril of life looking back to a happy childhood. And whether a man looks back with joy or with tears—and for most of us there is something of both in the vision—there is something fit and beautiful in the attitude. That is not sentimentalism. We are too visionary to hand over the fairest moments and moods of life to that mixture of irresponsible feeling and unprofitable emotion that sentimentalism connotes. We do not see how inadequate such an explanation is. Sentimentalism talks about 'dear dead days beyond recall.' But the days do not die. They come back to us. And the dearer they were as we

lived through them the more fresh and vivid is their companying with us again.

There is, too, in this story the picture of a man beholding with a swift flash of insight the sacramental meaning of a simple deed. The water of the Bethlehem well was brought to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it. For him the water had become wine—the red wine of the sacrament of selfless love. And whenever for you and for me the veil is lifted from life's common things, and we see the passion and patience and divinity and eternity hidden in daily service, whenever the water in the cup of life runs red in our eyes, we live through a beautiful hour ; and some day God will look for the impress of that hour on our inner life and the fruit of it in our outer fellowship.

And then there is, too, in this story a picture of heroism. We see three stalwarts of David's army making their way through the enemy's lines in the blazing sun, taking their lives in their hands—or shall we not say more truly, not thinking about their lives at all—that their leader might have the desire of his heart. And that is the picture—the beautiful thing that I have chosen out of the other fair things—that we may just now look at it and think about it.

It is abundantly clear that no one sent the three on their splendid errand. It is highly probable that

had David known of their project he would have forbidden it. Some one had heard a few words of the king's soliloquy. His wish was whispered through the camp. And these men went forth unknown to him to meet it. Nor was the journey of the three through the enemy's lines mere bravado, or for fame's sake. They of all men had least temptation in these directions. It were vain to boast a courage that all men knew, and unnecessary to seek a fame already won. Each man had found his place long since. They had been the heroes of many a fight.

Let us look for the lesson of their deed. Let us look for the gospel of heroism, the inner history of brave hearts. Heroism is one of life's timeless things. It belongs to no age or place. It needs no interpretation. It tells its own story and wins its meed of acknowledgement. Do not misunderstand that. Heroism is a quiet thing. The hero is not often an orator; and even if he should be, his own heroism would never seem to him to be a fit subject for an oration. He exercises no self-repression in the matter. He says nothing, because he does not know of anything to say. The service of courage is a very simple, obvious, undistinguished thing in the eyes of those that render it. The hero is always a man of few words, and the less he tells us the more we know;

the less he says the better we understand him. It is through the portal of silence that he comes to his own. If ever a man finds himself wishing that he could do some deed, make some sacrifice which would give him a name for courage, let him not think that he has (to use a current phrase and misleading at that) caught the heroic spirit, and that he is qualifying for a place in the roll of honour. Heroism lies not that way at all. Of all military honours, that which probably has been least consciously contended for is the Victoria Cross. It is self-forgetful love, and not self-regarding ambition, that wins that reward.

The hero does not think about the reward though he wins it. He does not think about the deed, he does it. He does not hold his life cheap. He does not think of his life. It does not enter into his reckonings. There are no reckonings for it to enter into. Calculation is never a strong point with the hero. The truest heroisms can be shown to have been part of the day's work for those who did them. Yes, and part of their essential character too. The deed does not make the hero: it manifests him. Danger does not bestow the heroic spirit: it demands it. The demand often comes suddenly, but the power to meet it comes of all a man's yesterdays. It is a growth. Heroism is always spontaneous; but the

spontaneous things in life have the longest history. The words that leap to the lip of their own accord, the deeds done without a moment's premeditation, are the outcome of the real self a man has been fashioning all his life. The thing that responds to the spur of the moment is the habit of years. There is nothing so historical in a man's life as his impromptus. The crises of life are decided in apparently uncritical hours. Through all life's least eventful passages of experience we are deciding how we shall bear ourselves in life's supreme moments. The truest courage is so closely woven into the fabric of a man's thought and feeling—is such an integral part of his spiritual self—that it may be called an instinct.

And now we can, I think, safely come back to the picture of David's three warrior friends. Now we are prepared to find in their heroism a message for our lives. For we have looked and seen something of the heroic spirit. We have looked beneath the surface, and we have at least prepared ourselves to believe that the voice that spake to three soldiers one summer day and sent them cheerful and determined across the death-haunted valley of Rephaim, is speaking also in our lives. We have looked at simple heroism stripped of any accidental trappings—taken out of those martial or romantic settings which have led so

many to misunderstand it. We have seen that heroism is an inward and spiritual thing born of an unselfish attitude and a heart full of love. And now, I say, it is not such a far cry from the valley of Rephaim to the office in the city, the warehouse, the counter and the street. Let us look each at his own life, unromantic, prosaic, monotonous; and see whether, after all, the prosaism and monotony are not rather in the fashion of our spirit than in the shape of our circumstance. It is the heroic heart that makes the heroic situation. And there is room in your life and mine for that loyal uncalculating love that sent three men in the full tide of their life and with the glory of the harvest all about them on an errand that looked so very like costing them their lives.

There is a sense in which we cannot have too high a conception of heroism. When in our mind we paint the picture of the ideal hero, we cannot make the light in his eyes too beautiful and the poise of his head too kingly. It is altogether good that we should so think of heroism as to prevent our offering the hero's crown to the essentially unheroic life. But we must lift our conception of life and the true terms of it and the spiritual setting of it and the constant issues of it till we come to see that the one man who can ever hope to do justice to life is the hero. Surely the heroic spirit is not like the red

bloom of the aloe that bursts upon the view once in a century! The inward conditions of its existence are constant and abiding. The hero's work was not finished when the last stake was set up in the market-place and the flame of the last martyr-fire flickered out. There is need of him while one poor soul in the city trembles under the shadow of tyranny, or writhes in the grip of unscrupulous power. The most real and awful tyranny in the world is the tyranny of sin. The hero knows that. That knowledge goes to the development of the hero. Where sin is an abstraction heroism is a dream. The gleam in the hero's eyes never came from the shimmer of a false optimism or the glamour of a weak and soothesome view of the evil that is in the world.

We have many ways of picturing the religious life. We have the picture of the pilgrim leaning on his staff and shading his eyes to catch a glimpse of the city of light. We have the picture of the steward ordering all things fitly against his master's coming. We have the soldier standing bravely by his comrades and his king. But there is one picture perfectly familiar to the mediaeval mind that we can ill afford to lose, and that is the picture of the saint and the dragon. If there is one thing above another that the modern saint needs it is a personal interview with a dragon.

Go back to your boyhood's days and recall the time when to you the dragon was quite as admirable a figure in his way as was the saint, though your sympathies were always with the saint. Supposing that some day the story had been remodelled thus: And lo, the saint looked about him and saw the clouds of smoke in the air, and said, 'There is a dragon somewhere in the neighbourhood, we must try to purify the atmosphere that the dragon is contaminating.' What would you have said? You wouldn't have stood it for a moment. Saints didn't exist in those days to deal with atmospheres, but with dragons. The saint had to go down into the black jaws of the cavern, lighted only with the lurid flames of the dragon's mouth, and engage the beast in mortal combat; and the saint had to win. Otherwise what profit in being a saint, or what claim to the name? And that, I say, is the picture we want. It is all very well to talk about cleansing atmospheres and lifting the tone of things, but the only thing worth doing, the only practicable service, is going for the dragon. And that means we must have heroes. We must have the heroic spirit and the heroic conception of the fight. We must see the dragons blasting the fair and pleasant places of our land—the drink-dragon, the gambling-dragon, the lust-dragon, the greed-dragon. We must gird on the whole armour of God and track

each beast to its inmost lair, and slay it, or die fighting it. But a fight like that is not to be lightly enterprised; and fitness for such a fight is not to be won in a day. And where shall you and I find the necessary training for deeds of such high spiritual emprise? We shall find it just where we are. God has so ordered things that the daily round is the school for heroes. The essence of heroism is self-sacrifice. A man's potential heroism is to be gauged by his actual unselfishness. Some one has said—

> 'Tis as hard at duty's call
> To lay one's life down day by day
> As to lay it down once for all.

Those words at least suggest to us that here, on the levels of familiar experience and apparently limited demand, as there on the heights of opportunity or in the depths of pain, heroism is one and the same thing.

And now, after all, we should leave the highest truth about heroism unuttered if we forgot to say that the central element of it is always personal. There is no exception to that. Men have done brave deeds for the sake of great causes; but even if they themselves knew it not, it was the response of their spirit to the spirit of those who had made the causes great. Here, in our story, it is plain to see that, though David

knew nothing about the errand of his three soldiers, yet it was he who sent them out to do it. He had won their love and their loyalty. They went for their leader's sake. And when we turn to this great fight of life, this peril-haunted valley of the world, and see a man going forth unregardful of himself, uncareful of his life, to fulfil a ministry of refreshment and help, to offer some service of love, we know what to say of that man. We know he is a Christ's man ; and that the hand that feels for the sword-hilt is tingling with the touch of that wounded palm. Men have died for the cause, but it has been because it was Christ's cause. They have suffered for principles, but those principles have come to them pulsating with the warmth of the eternal Friend of man and majestic with the majesty of the Son of God. The heroism of a great conviction always proves itself to be, when we come to look into it, the heroism of a great communion.

XIV

The Buried Wells

And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father: for the Philistines had stopped them up.—GEN. xxvi. 18.

TAKEN as a simple fragment of history, these words need no explanation and call for no comment. But as I stand and watch Isaac and his servants working away at those old and disused wells, clearing out of them all the earth and stones with which the wanton Philistines had choked them up, till at last they set free once more the cool sweet water that had quenched no man's thirst for many a year, I can find truth in a parable. Part of your work and mine in the world is to look for the buried springs of life's sweet and wholesome water. And as we are now going to be busied mainly with these springs, let us pause for a moment before we look down for them, and let us look right up into the heavens above us that we may remember whence their water comes.

There is a deep sense in which every life might say, 'All my springs are in Thee.' With that vision in our hearts we need not be afraid to speak of springs of good in men's lives. To say that you can hear the ripple of a spring is not to say you never heard the splash of falling rain. You can honour the water in the well without despising the original and continuous bounty of the skies. And so, with the great over-arching heaven in our minds all the time, we can begin our search for the earthly wells.

And they need looking for. They are often lost beneath the drift of the years, or choked up by the rubbish that a Philistine world has cast into them. And it is easy to forget that they are there. We see the ground trampled and dust-strewn, and there is little or nothing to suggest that down beneath that unpromising surface there is a spring that might be helping to refresh a tired and thirsty world.

What do we see as we look out on life day by day? There is no need that I should try to draw the picture. It has been drawn often enough. Nay, I think it has been drawn too often. Little is gained by wandering up and down in the valley of Gerar after the Philistines have passed through it, unless your mind is filled with a vision of all the valley might have been but for the tramp of the enemies' feet. It is only the idealist who can really see things as they are. The world goes its

way before our eyes. We see the long procession of flippancies and vanities, the struggle for money, the false standards and mean rivalries of social life. We see this man lifted in his pride and that man sunk in his shame. And sometimes we think, as we look upon these things, that we are facing the facts of the case. But we are not. We must get down beneath the surface. We must not be too easily satisfied with facts. More folk have been led astray by facts than by fancies. Witness, for instance, some of the modern social propaganda, dealing with facts that no sane man would dispute, and yet not worth the paper on which it is printed or the breaths of those who advocate it. What you and I have to find is not merely facts, but ultimate facts, basal facts, divine facts. Beneath the materialism of the world's ideals we must find the divinity of the world's destiny. Beneath men's absorption in the arid temporalities we must find their quenchless thirst for the water of life. Beneath the barren and trampled surface of humanity we must find the wells of reverence and faith and love that God Himself has sunk in these hearts of ours. Man was made to worship and believe and aspire. God made him so. This Philistine world succeeds in burying deep the springs of the heart's true life. The wells are choked.

That is the sad fact on which we have to concentrate

our toil. But that involves another fact, bright and inspiring and thrilling—the wells are there. Isaac and his servants worked with a will, with a steady enthusiasm, amidst those piles of stones and heaps of earth. A bystander knowing nothing of the history of these desert spots might well have wondered at the sight of such hopeful toil amid such unpromising surroundings. But they who were doing the work were in possession of one fact that afforded them complete inspiration. They knew that there were springs of water if only they had the energy and patience to come at them.

The essential spirituality of human life is an ultimate fact. When we toil for the souls of men, we are not working on the strength of a speculation. We are not prospecting. Like Isaac of old, we work where our Father Himself has worked before us. Down in the deeps of every human life He has set the sweet waters of spiritual possibility. He has made men for honour and not dishonour, for faith and not unbelief, for self-respect and not self-degradation, for hope and not despair, for the heavenly eternity and not the earthly hour ; and the proof of this is written not only in the heights of a divine revelation but in the depths of every soul of man. And here we may take our stand, none daring to make us afraid. There have been times when the theologians would have called us over-

bold. Theology has before now come very near denying the existence of these wells. But it is a comfort to find that no matter in what direction theology has gone astray, it has never been able to take religion with it. That explains how a man can be better than his creed. And so the world has many a time had the edifying spectacle of some earnest souls formally denying the existence of these buried springs of potential good, and practically digging for them every day of their lives.

'He digged again the wells of . . . Abraham his father; . . . and called them after the names by which his father had called them.' Is not that the story of Jesus of Nazareth? Oh how Jesus sought and found the hidden springs of good in human life! His enemies in their malice and shortsightedness called Him the 'friend of publicans and sinners.' The phrase has become passing sweet in our ears. It holds for us a priceless truth. But in the lips of those who first uttered it it was a shallow lie. As a reflection upon the moral affinities of Jesus it was a blasphemy. As a revelation of the eternal worth of sinful men and women, in the eyes of eternal love it is a holy truth. 'Friend of publicans and sinners.' As His enemies meant it Jesus was never that. It was a moral impossibility that Jesus should be that. There is no sort of affinity between infinite purity and the foulness

of sin. There is utter and final antagonism. As St. Paul puts it: 'What communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?' Jesus did not love the publican, extortionate and sordid, nor the woman of the city, for the shameless life they led. He looked into the depths of their lives and found the man and woman whom God had made. He saw the possibilities of justice and sympathy, of self-respect and purity, and He loved that which He found. 'This man receiveth sinners,' they said. Yes, but it was not their sin that appealed to Him. He had nothing but hatred and wrath for that. But Jesus knew, and He is teaching us to know, that no man could be a sinner if he had not the making of a saint in him. Christ's unflinching truth and unmeasured love sank deep shafts of discovery and self-revelation into those buried lives. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' 'I and My Father are one.' Yes, even as Isaac found in the devastated valley of Gerar the wells of his father Abraham, so did Jesus find in the barren hearts of men the wells of His Father God. They were choked with sins and the cares of the years, but He found them and sounded them, and let into them the light and air of the sky of the Father's mercy, and set the water of life, love and faith and hope, flowing into these poor world-choked hearts.

Jesus seeks men because they are worth seeking. He died for men because they were worth dying for. He saves men because they are worth saving. The Cross not only reveals to us the depth of God's love and the depth of man's sin, it reveals to us the depths of man's soul. And, my friends, we cannot serve men as God means we should serve them until we have learned to look on them as Jesus looked on them.

The ultimate fact in the worldliest life is not its worldliness. It is the buried but living possibility of response to the love of God, response to the tender pleading and heavenly promise and sacrificial obedience of the Saviour of the world. To have contempt of any human life is to misinterpret the Cross of Christ. That youth whose place of worship is the hippodrome, and who passed you in the street singing the refrain of a song caught from the reigning goddess of the week, seems shallow enough. But there is some deeper music in him than that. It is as if one should play a vulgar ditty on a great organ. The air is mean, but the instrument is noble. It has great diapasons and a vox celeste. It was not made to sing silly songs. It was made for the Gloria in Excelsis. And it is so easy to forget that there is a place waiting for that gay youth in the great anthem of praise that began 'when the morning stars sang

together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.' And if some time this week you meet that youth, as perhaps you will, do not cast round for something mundane enough to be pleasant to him. Do not be content to ask his opinion of Manchester City's chances of the cup—though that might be a useful introduction to something better worth talking about. Remember the place waiting for him among the sons of God. Remember the deeps. Whatever you may say about the gilded youth of this city, about the miser, or the poor painted woman of the pavement, or the dull, grey-lived dwellers in the slums—do not call them shallow.

Perhaps you never have done so. Perhaps you wonder why I am telling you what you could just as easily be telling me. I will give you my reason. Some things have to get a long way into our minds before they get even a little way into our practices. It is possible to talk *about* people as if they were very deep, and to talk *to* them as if they were very shallow. How often does our daily converse with our fellows get beneath the surface? How often does it touch life's deep things? It is so easy to hold high and noble views of humanity, and to talk to men and women mainly about the weather and the crops. But there is another kind of weather and another harvest: the world is full of storm-beaten souls, full of men and

women whose real deep need is that some one should say some swelling word of sympathy and hope tc them as they stand lonely and sad in the field of life so unready for the angel reapers.

Ah but, say some, 'the deeps of life are sacred.' Yes, I know they are sacred. But men's talk about the sanctity of life's hidden things is sometimes a veil that scarcely hides their indifference to those things. I am afraid that too often we leave the deeps of life untouched, not because we remember they are sacred, but because we forget they are there. A tender, humble reverence for every human soul is part of the secret of soul-winning. But when a man's reverence for his brother's soul is a cheap substitute for any practical interest in his brother's salvation, that man's reverence is indifference and contempt. It is a sin to be repented of. It is the very zenith of cant. It is often alleged against a certain type of Evangelism that it seeks to lay violent hands on men's souls, and that therein it lacks reverence for the soul. May I venture, here in this Mecca of Evangelism,[1] to say there is perhaps a grain of truth in the criticism. It is never wise to try to break into the house of life, even though you wish to give and not take. One is so easily mistaken for an intruder, and there is in most of us a rooted antipathy to intrusion. We

[1] This sermon was preached at the Central Hall, Manchester.

must have respect unto a man's threshold ; but if that respect is to be worthy of anything it must be born of reverence for a man's inner room. The gospel must sometimes involve the infringement of a convention in the name of an eternal truth.

I would rather answer the charge of having been over eager to come at the depths of men's lives on the errands of my Master Christ than the charge of having held back from those depths in the name of the conventions. Christian Evangelism stands for the inner room of life. It stands for the deeps of life. It stands for reverence for the human soul. Not an anaemic, aesthetic, sentimental reverence that babbles about the glory of humanity and has nothing to say to humanity in its shame ; but a reverence that is own brother to strong-winged hope and flaming love.

And now let me say a word about the intensely personal aspect of all this. There are some words in the hymn of a sorrowful soul that will help us here if we use them in a way that certainly never occurred to the writer of them. 'Deep calleth unto deep.' Only the deep in one life can find the deep in another life. That is the law of influence. That is the limit of a man's power over his fellows. That is a spiritual principle that no man who would win souls must forget. Indeed, who of us can forget it ? It is forced in upon us every day. I well remember how I

went forth to preach my first sermon. My main fear was that I should not be able to preach long enough. I soon made the perilous discovery how easy it is to talk. The problem became reversed, and my fear was that I should not be able to preach short enough. But my fear to-day is that I cannot preach deep enough; and that is not a fear that can be slain with the pen, for the depth of one's words is just the depth of one's character.

My friends, it is no good uttering the profundities. We must live them. There is a prayer that is one of the classics of the prayer-meeting, and we need ever to be praying it: 'O Lord, deepen Thy work of grace in our hearts.' The peril of the external, the formal, the habitual threatens us all. The dust and rabble of the world is ever tending to silt up the deep wells of reverence, and faith, and compassion, and enthusiasm that God has sunk in our lives. It is only as the prayer for the deeper work of grace is answered that we shall be able to touch and stir the deeper things in other lives, and that our tired and thirsty brothers shall find the waters of sympathy and service springing up sweet and available in the well of our heart.

XV

Faith and Haste

He that believeth shall not make haste.—Isa. xxviii. 16.

IT would be very easy to preach what some would call 'a beautiful sermon' from this text; but a sermon, alas! that would not work out in daily life as men have to live it. I am not sure that an idyll from the pulpit now and again would not do us all good; but the weak point of that form of teaching is this, that the truth in its idyllic forms is often taken lightly or altogether missed by those whose lives are thronged and pressed by the material claims and needs of human life. So we will try to find the working meaning of our text. We will try to find some interpretation of it that will not become strangely dim and shadowy and ineffective on Monday morning. But if I meet you in this way, and try to keep in close touch with your lives in a tense and strenuous world, I may reasonably ask you to meet me as I endeavour to point out to you things which this same

world knows little about ; or, knowing them, chooses to ignore them. And the one thing in particular I will ask you to do is this. Be just to the unworldliness of the text. Do not conclude, as many do, that because a thing is unworldly it is therefore unworkable. And I think if we each keep to the terms of our agreement, we shall find some points of contact between faith in God and daily life which will be of real service to us all.

'He that believeth shall not make haste.' That does not mean he that believeth shall never be hurried. This matter of haste is not a purely personal matter. We live in a hasting world—a world full of conditions that we did not make and must accept. In the heart of a swaying crowd it is nonsense for a man to say, 'I will not be swayed.' The crowd settles that matter for him. But he can say, 'I will keep calm and collected,' and can make good his word. And if there are fifty people or five hundred scattered through that crowd, each one of them a centre of quiet self-control, one can conceive it possible for the crowd eventually to be steadied and stilled. We cannot live as if this world were a quiet world. We cannot ignore the rush of life. A man in his office may be a saint, but the most beatific vision he shall ever enjoy will not silence the ting-ting of his telephone bell, or stop the rush of telegrams, or lessen that pile of

letters that he finds on his desk every morning of the week.

But whilst it is true that haste is inevitably involved in vast and widespread conditions of life which have been slowly made and cannot be instantly altered, it is equally true that in the last analysis of them those conditions are inward and spiritual, and can only be altered as each man learns to adjust his own life to the highest and the holiest laws of it.

A thousand men with a wrong view of life make it hard for any one of their number to get and follow the right view ; but we cannot escape from the fact that each man has his thousandth part of responsibility for the difficulty that in its entirety influences them all.

Now the prophet makes the question of how men live life a matter of faith. That is going to the very core of things. We do not merely accept conditions of life—we help to make those conditions. And the prophet claims this much for faith, that it can teach a man an inward attitude of mind and heart towards all this busy world which shall save him from the curse —the spiritual blight—of these feverish times, and which, when all men have learned it as God means they should, shall banish from life all vain, cruel, and unprofitable pressure.

How comes it that the world is so full of haste?

The final answer to that question is not in circumstances, but in the men that have fashioned circumstances; not in the way the outward life impinges upon us, but in our soul's attitude towards it. This terrible, feverish, dust-laden urgency that marks the modern world seems to be made up of countless things acting and reacting upon the men who have caused them to come into existence; but, getting down to the root of it all, one can see that this haste must come either from an increasingly true or an increasingly false view of life. Either men are drawing nearer to life or they are getting farther away from it. I think we shall see that the latter suggestion contains the secret of this great and growing problem of haste. Isaiah linked this great word about living life quietly with a prophecy concerning the Christ who was to come. Christ has come, and the manner of His life among men, and the spirit of it, we know. He said He came that men might have life. It was life they were missing then. And, strange though it seems to say it in these pulsating and strenuous days, it is life they are missing now.

Jesus understood life completely. He was more human than we are, because He was divine, and His divinity took hold of all that is essential in humanity. And that was the secret of the quietness of the life of Jesus. It was a life lived for the essential things.

It is missing these things that turns life into a rush and a whirl and a selfish struggle. The world is in a mighty hurry, not because its life is so full—though that is the way it always accounts for its haste—but because it is so empty; not because it touches reality at so many points, but because it misses it at all points. The more we hurry the less we live. Life is not to be gauged merely quantitatively. There is a qualitative measurement. The length of life is found by measuring its depth. It goes inward to the core of the soul. It takes its meaning there and carries that meaning out into the eternity of God. The things that really make life are the things out of which haste for ever cheats a man. 'He that believeth' in Christ the 'sure foundation'—he, that is to say, who accepts Jesus's interpretation of life—shall not make haste, because his faith shall show him the futility and the needlessness of haste. It shall gird him with the patience and the peace of them that seek the essential things—wealth of soul, strength of character, purity of heart, communion with God—things that impatience cannot seize in a moment and that faith cannot miss if it seeks them.

It is true that under favourable circumstances selfishness may seem to live without haste. A man may take life quietly because he does not take it seriously. He may be quiet because he is asleep. But that is

not the quietness of faith. Let not this selfish sluggard claim a place among the disciples of a quiet life. In the eyes of faith life in all its concerns grows ever greater, and the greater a thing life becomes in a man's eyes the more disposed does he become, and the more able, to live it out quietly. Haste is the product of a low and mistaken view of life. It is the outcome of a vast delusion concerning the things that matter and the things that last. Faith discovers the delusions, and lays hold upon the few great simple things that really count in life's long reckonings—the clean heart, the good conscience, justice, mercy, sympathy, and the service of love.

And, further, the haste of the world is the result of the short view of life. The world is in such a desperate hurry because it has no plan, no toil, no aspiration, which the nightfall will not blot out. Look at the pathetic parable of haste written right across the world—the hurried step, the strained face, the life-driven expression with which we are all too familiar. It means that the world is busy with work it will soon have to put down. If a man means to make money, he knows that he has but a few mortal years to make it. The desire of the world is of the days and the years. 'Now or never' is stamped upon its activities and its enterprises. I do not mean that the haste of the world comes because men have an over-

whelming sense of, or even any sense at all, of the brevity of life. The modern world does not think of such things. But neither does it think upon and realize the eternity of life; and it is failing to do this that makes men the prey of haste. Faith in Jesus Christ teaches us that every man must have time to live. He that believeth shall not make haste. He has eternity for a practical factor. He learns by his faith to live in the eternal now. His faith reveals to him the simple moral content of the present. There is a sense in which faith alone can live for the present, because faith alone has the future. Unbelief has no to-morrow. Worldliness has no time to live. We often say, 'I wish I had more time,' meaning, of course, that we wish we could dispose of the hours of the day more in accordance with our personal desires. But our real need in life is not more time but more eternity. Instead of saying, 'Now or never,' Christ teaches us to say, 'Now and for ever.' He that believeth shall find the eternal meaning and the eternal issues of these fleeting hours. He shall know that he has time in which to do his best because the highest faith of his soul, the deepest desire of his heart, the most real significance of his daily toil, goes on for ever into the eternity of God.

He that believeth can live for to-day a life unhampered by the claims of to-morrow because he is living

for the for-ever. He shall not be afraid of missing anything really worth having. He shall not clutch with too eager hands at life as it seems to be rushing past him, for his faith shall teach him—the Christ shall teach him—that life is not something that rushes past us and must be grasped at or missed, but something that dwelleth in us, and the true name of it is the peace of God through Jesus Christ the Saviour and the Lover of souls.

So, my friends, it comes to this when all is said: it is our unbelief, our irreligion, our foolish eagerness for the things that do not matter and do not endure, our foolish blindness to the quiet, everlasting things, whereof each one of us may fashion his life if he will, that make us the easy prey of an anxious, restless, and precipitant world. Wouldst thou be delivered from the haste that is about thee? Then seek first of all and always to be delivered from the haste that is within thee.

This busy world will surge about thee with the tread of restless feet and the throb of restless hearts. And little that thou shalt do will seem to make a pause in the rush of things. But thou mayest in Christ find rest unto thy soul. Thou shalt rest in thy work, knowing that duty is eternal; rest in thy service of the brotherhood, knowing that sacrifice is eternal; rest in thy purest earthly communion, knowing that love is eternal. This is the hasteless life, and he that believeth in Christ, the same shall live it.

XVI

The Brook that Dried Up

And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Hide thyself by the brook Cherith. . . . And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up. . . . Get thee to Zarephath.—1 KINGS xvii. 2-3, 7, 9.

THERE is no stranger story in the lips of men than the story of God's providence. Sometimes very manifest in its workings, sometimes very obscure, always full of love, always working out the best, always right in the end. It is one thing to be in God's hands—as we all most surely are ; it is another thing to know this is so. The sense of dependence is easily lost. God does not stamp all His gifts with the broad seal of heaven. The one divine touch that testifies to the other-world origin of life's commonest bounty is sometimes like the hall-mark on precious metal-work—put where you won't see it unless you look for it. God is ever helping us to help ourselves, and ever weaving His ministries of help through and around our human efforts, till we cannot say where the one begins and the other ends. And often we say, 'I alone did it.'

But this is not always so. Sometimes we get to the end of our resources and know we have got there. Like Elijah, we are face to face with a famine. And of many a man in that strait it stands written, 'And the word of the Lord came unto him.'

Oh, those saving and comforting messages that are borne unto men across the bare and blighted fields of life! We have heard them, and have thanked God for the wilderness even more than for the valley clothed with corn. In the land where the bread and the water were failing fast, Elijah was led to Cherith and fed there. That is a very simple passage in the history of God's providence—a very simple illustration of the promise, 'My God shall supply all your need.' But the second chapter of the story makes much harder reading. 'It came to pass that the brook dried up.' God sent Elijah to the brook, and it dried up. It did not prove equal to the need of the prophet. It failed. God knew it would fail. He meant it to fail.

It was a hard thing for Elijah to see the brook dwindling day after day until there was scarcely a cupful of water in the pools that had formed in the drying bed of the stream. He probably thought what men have ever thought in such a case as his, 'Has God forgotten me? Has the evil day just been staved off for a time? Is this sojourn of mine at Cherith more a fortunate

chance than a divine interposition?' And then in his extremity the word of the Lord came again to Elijah, and he learned that the failure of the brook was part of the divine programme of assistance.

'The brook dried up.' This is an aspect of the divine providence that sorely perplexes our minds and tries our faith. We can more easily recognize the love that gives than the love that takes away. 'How providential!' When do we say that? It is when Cherith is singing and babbling in our ears. We say it when a life is spared, a wish is granted, an undertaking is completed, a need is met. With some people providence is another word for getting what they ask for, and being able to complete their own plans. With many people providence has no meaning, or even existence, apart from the glad and successful passages of human experience. They find a friend, a way out of their difficulty, a solution of their personal problem; and lo! there is no doubt that providence had a hand in this. But hunger and pain and death; the hard way; grey days; black nights; lost powers; severed fellowships; surrendered purposes and broken hopes,—what do we say of these things? Hot and unwise words at times. The education of our faith is incomplete if we have not learned that there is a providence of loss, a ministry of failing and of fading things, a gift of emptiness.

The Brook that Dried Up

The material insecurities of life make for its spiritual stablishment.

A desperate situation may prove a great and notable blessing. Before a man can say to the deep satisfaction of his soul, 'God is true,' he may have to find a good many things false. It is easier to trust the gift than the giver, easier to believe in Cherith than to believe in Jehovah. God knows that there are heavenly whispers that men cannot hear till the drought of trouble and weariness has silenced the babbling brooks of joy. And He is not satisfied until we have learned to depend, not on His gifts but upon Himself.

So providence is a progressive thing. It is a development. There is nothing final in it. That dwindling stream by which Elijah sat and mused is a true picture of the life of each one of us. 'It came to pass that the brook dried up'—that is a history of our yesterdays, and a prophecy for our morrows. I do not mean that these words tell the whole story of life, or even a very large part of it, for any one of us; but in some way or other we all have to learn the difference between trusting in the gift and trusting in the Giver. The gift may be for a while, but the Giver is the Eternal Love. The abiding thing in life is that word of the Lord that comes afresh into our hearts day by day.

The Brook that Dried Up

Let us trace that word right through this passage in the life of Elijah. 'Hide thyself by the brook Cherith'—'the brook dried up'—'get thee to Zarephath.' Perhaps Elijah thought he had come to the end of the book when he had really only come to the end of the first chapter. There was a pause, and then God turned the leaf for him, and Elijah learned that although he had come to the end of his resources God was but at the beginning of His. The providence of God leads us into some hard places, but it never leaves us there. Cherith is only a halting-place, it is not our destination. We need to-morrow to explain to-day. We must get to the end before we can interpret the beginning. The explanation of the hard words of life lies in the context. Too often, I think, we take them and study them by themselves. Let us have patience to read the sequel. Let us learn to wait for God's explanations. Cherith was a difficult problem to Elijah until he got to Zarephath, and then it was all as clear as daylight. God's hard words are never His last words. The woe and the waste and the tears of life belong to the interlude and not to the finale. If only Elijah, as he sat by the dwindling stream, could have seen the widow's cottage at Zarephath, with the meal and the oil that failed not, he would have had no test of faith, and no vision of God such as he did have. God did not

mean His servant to behold the resources of Zarephath until he had been brought face to face with that availing mercy that knows no bounds of circumstance, and that is ever brooding over a good man's pathway. Elijah looked into the eyes of famine, and then upward into the face of God. And then was he brought from the brook that failed to the meal that failed not.

And surely that is a parable of God's way with us all. We can all say with thankful hearts, 'The Lord gave'; and maybe all of us have had to say, 'and the Lord hath taken away': but if we are patient and faithful we shall find grace to finish with that victorious doxology, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord; for He hath given unto me double for all my loss.' The ministry of all that passeth away is meant to beget in our hearts a growing confidence in all that endureth for ever. The lesson of all fading things is not the brevity of life, but the eternity of love. When the pleasant and comforting babble of some Cherith falls on silence, it is but that we may hear the low deep murmur of the river of God that is full of water. It is the note of uncertainty in the voices of time that sets our heart listening for the unfaltering message of the eternal.

And thus this story in the life of Elijah may be made to cast a strong light on those experiences of our lives

that are hardest to bear and most difficult to understand: the crises, the frustrations, the dilemmas, the seeming impotences and futilities. These things must be looked upon as links in a chain or as stages in a journey. The way to Zarephath lies by Cherith. This is the precious paradox of providence —that God builds the final success on the basis of the temporary failure. We would like to go straight to Zarephath. We can understand the Zarephath providence. We can duly appreciate a roof over our head and a certain steady balance between demand and supply. But there are things that cannot be taught us amid such securities as these. I speak in a parable. There are things that we cannot learn unless we sojourn nearer to the borderland of need: unless we some day watch a failing brook in a famished land. Had Elijah been led straight to Zarephath he would have missed something that helped to make him a wiser prophet and a better man. He lived by faith at Cherith. And whensoever in your life and mine some spring of earthly and outward resource has dried up, it has been that we might learn that our help and hope are in God who made heaven and earth.

For most people life has had its precarious situations, its baptisms of need, its hungry patiences, and its blank outlooks. The students of old-world geography seem to be at a loss where to locate

Cherith; but there is no doubt in the minds of many people as to where it is, for they have been there. And life would have been poorer for them if they had not been there. Poverty, sorrow, disappointment, loneliness—these and a hundred other things may be the burden of the song that the brook sings as the silence of drought falls slowly and surely upon it; but the inner message is the same for every man who sits by that brook—and it is this, 'Have faith in God.'

Zarephath with its securities and its comforts would perhaps have been a dangerous place for Elijah but for Cherith. Maybe God in His great wisdom cannot trust us at Zarephath as a permanent abode. We might forget Him. Be that as it may, let us go forward well assured of this, that there awaits us the Cherith of our faith's trial and the Zarephath of our heart's satisfaction; and that wherever we may be, the most significant thing to us is neither the brook that fails nor the oil that fails not, but the word of the Lord that endureth for ever.

XVII

'Now Naaman was a Leper, but——'

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valour—but he was a leper.—2 KINGS v. 1.

AS a rule our interest in the story of Naaman centres round the dramatic incident of his healing in the waters of Jordan. Looking at the story as a whole, and seeing it in its true perspective, it is inevitable that this should be the case. But I am going to ask you to look at the history of Naaman from another point of view. What can we gather from the story of Naaman's life before there came into it the whisper of hope through the lips of the little captive girl—his wife's lady's-maid? Leprosy, the most terrible disease of the East, had developed in him. It had come in a form that did not involve exclusion from society. It was the white leprosy, which is one of the most slowly developing forms of the disease. In this particular form the leprosy is all under the skin, and the disease, which

may run its course for more than twenty years, results in the end in an utter absence of feeling—unless it changes its form in the later stages and becomes virulent and loathsome. It is possible that Naaman had been suffering from this incurable disease for a number of years before the light of hope broke into his life. Assuming this to be so, let us read our text in another way.

'Now Naaman was a leper—but he was captain of the host of the king of Syria, a great man with his master, and honourable, a deliverer of his country and a mighty man of valour.'

There is a picture of a man living out his life fully and bravely in spite of a terrible handicap in the form of an incurable disease, which must year after year gain a stronger hold on his body and eventually end his life. I grant you that the picture is pagan in its setting. Naaman worshipped the gods of the Aramaean Pantheon. But there are lessons in this man's attitude towards life that we may, with no little profit, humble ourselves to learn. The situation that Naaman had to face is not the exceptional in life; it is rather the universal. Getting, for a moment, past the details of his trouble into the principle of it, we find that in different ways and in different degrees all men are called to face that in life which Naaman faced—an invincible, unavoidable, immovable limitation.

'Now Naaman was a Leper, but——'

We envy one another; we name in our minds the men with whom we would change places; but that is because we are very foolish and have not grasped the idea of the universality of difficulty and pain. If all pain left a broad mark in the sufferer's forehead; if, like the leprosy of Naaman, it could be seen at a glance, there would be an end of our fool's envying.

I do not think that Naaman in his popularity and success was a much-envied man. There was the fame and the power—and the leprosy. There was the honour—and the suffering. It is always so. There is always the other side of things. And if we could change personalities, we should have to be prepared to take not only the joys and the opportunities and the satisfactions of that other man's life, but also the martyrdoms, the baffle-ments, the burdens and the unlifting shadows. And remembering this may help to make us less envious and more sympathetic. No man's life-story can be told without naming the hard thing in it—sometimes the tragically hard thing. For some it is persistent ill-health—a body that is continually disappointing them, failing them, thwarting them. For some it is a nervous temperament that demands a cruel price for the fulfilment of daily demands—demands which others can meet with ease, and even with pleasure. For this man it is the shadow of a cruel and devas-

tating experience that must lie on his path to the last step of it; and for that it is some constitutional defect that has to be reckoned with in everything he does. In short, Naaman the leper may be looked upon as typical of the widest and most familiar range of human experience.

And the question comes, How do we face this side of things? Naaman faced it with courage. And it was courage of no mean order. It was not born of hope. We say sometimes, 'While there is life there is hope.' But that was not true in the case of the leper. He saw the long years of suffering, and knew, humanly speaking, that the way would only get harder the farther he went. Part of the work of life for him was to carry one of the heaviest burdens that a man ever has to carry—the burden of a dead hope. He could not say with regard to his disease, 'While there is life there is hope'; but he found a better and a nobler thing to say, 'While there is life there is duty.' There is no braver story in history than the story of them who have had to stoop and lift and bear the hope that might have lifted and borne them, if only both its wings had not been broken. Some of the world's leaders and deliverers and helpers have been men who have had courage to look beyond the thing that could not be, and who have known that the only way to overcome some things is to accept

them—the only way to conquer them is to bear them. The faith to remove mountains is not a complete equipment for life. We need also the courage and strength to climb them. There is something inspiring and edifying in the picture of a man from whom much has been taken daring to believe that more is left—if only he has courage to look for it; or in the picture of a man to whom much has been denied bravely confessing that more has been granted. The leper who found no time to pity himself or to bemoan his affliction; who forgot himself in the manifold toils and responsibilities of a field-marshal and a cabinet minister; and who saved his country's fortune at a critical period in her history—has something to teach us. Of all the luxuries of life, perhaps the most unwarrantable and in the end the most wasteful and costly is the luxury of despair. And how many there are who indulge in it! A man may have to walk in a deep shadow, but he has no right to sit in it. Much less has he the right to assume that that shadow loosens for him the bonds of duty, or absolves him from the claims of the world's work. Naaman did not let his leprosy spoil his career.

Yet how many there are who do let the one thing they cannot have rob them of the hundred things that may be theirs. 'But he was a leper.' These words do not serve as an excuse for a life that failed;

they serve rather as a dark background against which courage and endurance were able to paint a bright success. One cannot help feeling that Naaman, who bowed himself in the temple of the god Rimmon, whose religion offered no interpretation of pain, and who lived ages before the world had heard of the Captain of its salvation 'made perfect through suffering,' offers at once an example and a rebuke to some who are numbered by their profession among the members of the Christian Church, and who yet let their pain of life destroy the promise of life, and who cease to work in the measure that they are called to suffer.

And this brings us to the thing that was wanting in the courage and endurance of Naaman. As I conceded at the beginning, however instructive the story may be, it is pagan. Look at the Syrian captain sitting and fuming in his chariot at the door of Elisha. Look at the humiliating picture of this great lord in his pride and his rage and his wilfulness. His suffering had not sweetened his life. He had borne it; but he had not understood it. He had not been able to interpret a word of it. That was not his fault. And there is a sense in which his brave conquest over a disability which held for him no high or beautiful meaning may well beget in our hearts much shame—shame that we for whom the

pain of life has been made somewhat intelligible should still find it in no wise bearable. If only Naaman had known that it is not every man who is counted worthy to suffer, if only he could have sat at the feet of St. Paul, and could have heard all which that troubled and yet triumphant life could have told him of the ministry of pain and of the divine fulfilment that lies concealed in earthly frustration, how much richer would have been the story of those brave years! He did not know these things, and doubtless he was judged according to his knowledge; but we know them, and we shall be judged according to ours.

The lesson of Naaman's courage is one that we need perhaps to-day more than ever; but it is not all that we need. He can teach us much; but he cannot, no matter how long we study him, carry our education as far as it can be carried.

To sum things up, what is it that he can teach us, and what are these other things he himself had not learned? He can teach us to face the unalterable with courage. He can teach us that the inevitable is not the unconquerable; that men are not useful because they are happy, but that they are happy because they are useful; and that it takes more than the limitation resulting from ill-health, broken hopes, devastated resources, and persistently bitter experiences to blight a man's life. He can teach us how

much may be accomplished by the man who bravely accepts the call to work knowing that there is that in his life which must make every task harder, and every burden heavier to bear. And that much is worth learning. But Naaman cannot teach us the highest lessons of pain, and that interpretation of every hard thing that has been given to the world in the gospel of the suffering Son of God. Jesus has taught us by His life and by His Cross that pain is a burden meant to bless the life that bears it; that the limitations of the outward life may help men to find the freedom of the inward life; and that in Him all men may win the true victory over life's hard thing—the victory which cannot be his who merely faces pain with courage, or endures it with patience, but which awaits that man who by the grace of Christ finds its sacramental meaning, and passes through it into a better manhood on earth and a larger treasure in heaven.

XVIII

Consecration of the Commonplace

As every day's work required.—1 CHRON. xvi. 37.

EVERY day's work! Perhaps you think I might have found something better to speak about than that. The day's work! You are tired of it. You are hand-weary and heart-weary with it. It is for many of you a story of care, and anxiety, and all sorts of hindrance and belittlement. For all of you it is something from which at times you are glad to turn. More than once you have been not a little weary of it. And now you have stolen away from it and all its associations for a while, and have sheltered yourselves in the peace of God's house; and lo! the preacher has taken it for a text! He might surely have found something higher and nobler. 'Give us some beautiful, inspiring, quiet thoughts that will lift our lives and hush our spirits. Take us into the temple. Take us through the rent veil. Let us stand with bowed heads before the precious mysteries of the

kingdom of God. Feed our hearts on life's inward things. Tell us about some of those things we have not had time to think of during the last six days. My friends, I would not help you to forget the day's work, if I could; but I should like to help you to understand it. And as for taking you into the temple —that is just what I am doing. That is where I went to find this text. I saw the white-robed priests ministering before the altar. I heard their solemn litanies. I caught the fragrance of their incense. I stood among them as they performed their sacred ministry;—and lo! in the midst of it all I came across the day's work. I found it in the sanctuary.

Let me read you the whole verse of which our text forms the conclusion. 'So he left there, before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, Asaph and his brethren, to minister before the ark continually, as every day's work required.' That was the law of service in the tabernacle, and that is the law of service in the lives of all who would give themselves to God. The temple service was the day's work; the day's work was the temple service. And if it is given to me to make that a little plainer to some of you, I shall be well content.

The tabernacle and its symbolism have passed away. We have heard of another temple, even the temple of the heart; of another altar—the unseen altar of

sacrifice. But we do not understand, or we but imperfectly understand, how that the law of that altar is written in the day's work. Too often we think of the law of that altar as something remote and separate. Ever and again we let the thick of the world come between us and it. We look on the day's work as something that stands between us and the way of worship. We do not understand that the law of the altar is written in life just as we have to live it. It is bound up in the daily demand. It is involved in our immediate circumstance. The shadow of the Cross lies on all our toil for bread; and the manifold imperatives of earth are but the laws of heaven translated into a language that all who would do right can understand. God claims us for Himself. He waits to write His name in our hearts and to accomplish His purpose in our lives; but the fashion of that demand of His is 'as every day's work requires.' Religion is not something above and beyond life, it is not even something near life—it is life itself. It is the inward, all-persuasive spirit of it, if we are living as God means us to live. There is, it is true, an ineffable sacredness in the religion of Bethlehem and Calvary, but it is not the sacredness that must be isolated from a busy, dusty world. There are dogmas that mean little in the street and theologic definitions that are but a burden to the busy and a confusion to the simple,

but He to whom Bethlehem and Calvary owe all their significance lived and toiled and taught and sympathized and served in the heart of the workaday world.

If Jesus Christ made men to know anything, surely it was this—that the busier and the dustier the world they lived in, the more did they need the plea of the altar and the shadow of the Cross. God does not take us out of the world of men and things to make us His own. The Prince of Peace does not fix a pause in the whirl and clatter of a toilsome world to make His claim good in our lives. He does not show us His salvation in spite of the day's work, but by means of it. It is not an obstacle He overcomes; it is a means He uses. He comes to us in all we have to do from morn till even, and He says, 'This is My work if it is well done.'

We cannot hear too much about the divinity of toil, as long as we know what we are talking about. There is no divinity in toil for toil's sake. There is no spiritual glory and beauty in mere effort. Let us not deify labour. A man may work like a slave, and never catch a glimpse of God in all his toiling. But once let a man see the altar where the ultimate requirement of his work is written and the whole doing of it may be laid, and the seeming gulf between work and worship disappears. Once let a man see that the

thing that is called dire necessity, force of circumstance, bread-winning—the day's work—is just God coming to him, and speaking to him, and fashioning his life for him, and making him something better than he was and better than he is,—I say, let him see this, and then talk about the divinity of toil. Why, it is all divinity! There is a great word that we are afraid to bring into our lives because we are so busy, and because we handle material things hour after hour—the word consecration. But, whether we name it or no, it belongs to life at its busiest, life in its lowliest toils and its most commonplace situations. Possibly we associate the consecration of our lives to God with the quiet of some never-to-be-forgotten Sabbath service, or some hour when away from the voices of the world we heard God speaking to us, and gave ourselves for the first time, or afresh, unto His service and into His keeping in the name of Christ our Saviour. These passages in our experience mean all we have ever taken them to mean—and more; but we miss the truest significance of such experiences if our idea of consecration is limited to them. Consecration is not an act, it is an attitude. It is not an event, it is a process. It is not merely vowing a vow, it is keeping it. It is something that is made real and effectual as we meet the requirement of every day in the spirit of those memorable moments when in some special

manner God has touched our hearts and made His claim felt in our lives. There are no gaps in the divine purpose concerning us. God's work in our lives is all of a piece. The hours when the earthly fashion of life does not obscure its heavenly meaning, and when the divine claim seems the only thing worth listening to, are given to us for the sake of those hours when the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and when the many voices of the world are dinning their claims into our ears.

'As every day's work required.' That is the defining line of the service of faith. That is the measure of God's demand. Sometimes we do not understand this. We feel the consecrating power of solemn duties and great sorrows; and of those days that bring us face to face with definite and final moral choices. But every day is not a great day in this sense. More often life's demands are monotonous, and the situations it creates for us day by day are unheroic, fretful, and even belittling. The very toils and troubles and besetments of our lives seem essentially commonplace. Sometimes the littleness of it all makes us sick at heart.

But this is because we look at life in the wrong way. This is because we do not know that the temple service of life is not a periodic ceremonial, not a stately ordering of the soul at times and seasons. It is 'as

every day's work requires.' It is defined by and involved in the actual situation. Into all the grey fabric of life in its most familiar fashioning we can weave the golden threads of inward consecration. Common life's reality is one continuous opportunity for giving ourselves to God. The whole yielding of the heart's obedience to the will of the Heavenly Father is not finished in the hush of the Sabbath peace, in the call to a life-sacrifice or a life-sorrow. It is done little by little. It is involved in life's simplicities, its necessities, its monotonies, and its details. When you feel that to be so, you know that, for the soul, life is always great, and there are no trifles.

> The trivial round, the common task,
> Will furnish all we ought to ask:
> Room to deny ourselves—a road
> To bring us daily nearer God.

Thus we sing and thus we speak; and yet we go forth to find in the trivial round nothing but triviality, and in the common task nothing to make us sure of God and truth.

Perhaps there are some listening to me who have not answered the divine claim; who have made no attempt to offer to God in Jesus Christ the sacrifice of the heart. You are waiting, maybe, as I believe many do wait, for some special and irresistible appeal—some hour when, spaced off from all the

ministry of toil and care, you shall hear God speaking to you in sure and unmistakable tones. But are you not ignoring that appeal of His to you that is in every hour and place of life? 'As every day's work requires.' Do you not see how close that brings God to you? Do you not see how near to you lies the way of life and peace and godly service? The day's work! The thing you are tired of; the thing you think you know so well; the thing that holds for you no surprises, no revelations, no thrills of joy, no abiding satisfactions of spirit. Perhaps you do not know as much about it as you think. Perhaps you have only seen the earthly aspect of it—the wrong side of it, so to speak. The face of God, the peace of Jesus Christ, the light of the Spirit—you may find all these in the day's work if only you will believe it. This is God's way into our lives. This is our way into His life. This is the secret of sainthood—serving the divine Master as every day's work requires, recognizing the divine law in all human necessity. Seek for a truer sense of this daily requirement folded in life just as you have to live it. To bring the tenderness of Jesus Christ into every relationship, and the faithfulness of Jesus Christ into every labour; to remember that the inner purpose of the heart is the thing by which we stand or fall; to live for justice as some live for gain; and to serve the world, not

according to its base demands and harsh imperatives, but according to the large helpfulness of love—this is to live life 'as every day's work requires.' And for the man who lives thus the law of the altar ever becomes clearer and more continuously manifest in all that he has to suffer or to do, and every day finds him more sure that, for them that believe, the purposes of heaven are fulfilled and not frustrated through the necessities of earth.

XIX

The Large Room

Thou hast set my feet in a large room.—Ps. xxxi. 8.

TO many people these seem strange words to come from the lips of age and experience. It is youth and inexperience that find the world a large room. Before we came into touch with the realities of life, while the powers of mind and heart were still untried, we had visions of very wide possibilities, we felt within us suggestions of unfettered and inexhaustible powers. The world is a very roomy place —for the bairns. There are no impossibilities in the nursery. But as the happy careless days are left behind us ; as the days come when we have to think for ourselves, when life is no longer bounded by the morning and the evening of each day; as we look back on a past of which we are often heartily ashamed, or forward to a future of which we are not a little afraid ; as the rounding years bring responsibilities and sorrows,—the world seems to shrink, life closes in upon us and leaves us scarcely

room to breathe, and existence sometimes appears a very narrow, limited, and hampered affair. Those of you who have revisited places and scenes after the lapse of years will remember how much smaller everything appeared to you on that second visit. I remember during my college days visiting a well-known town in Derbyshire where I spent three years of my early boyhood. I went to the old manse garden—a garden that had once seemed so large that I felt a little bit lonely when the long shadows of the evening crept across the lawn, and darker shades gathered beneath the trees. I could hardly believe that I was back in the old spot; for I had always thought of that lawn as a prairie, and the few trees had been a forest. The place had grown smaller. No, it hadn't! It hadn't altered by a hand-breadth. It was I who had grown. Life seems to us at the beginning to have so much to give, because we have so little to ask. It may seem to us sometimes as if the supply had grown less; we are nearer the truth when we say the demand has grown greater. Life was boundless only because we could not see the boundaries. Now we have stronger vision, and we can see them; and now we must pray for stronger vision still—vision that can see beyond them. Every one has to part with that sense of the world's wideness that is born of a child's false perspective. Every one

must say good-bye to the freedom that comes of ignorance. Every one must outgrow the life that is easily satisfied, easily filled. But all do not realize that a man's emptiness is a finer thing than a child's fullness—that the process of growing up is not a narrowing, but a widening process. We must pass from the life in which we can see no limitations, into the life in which we overcome them. The worst of it is that so many count the illimitable horizon of childhood as nothing more than a beautiful illusion. They do not understand how that it is the will of God that a man should pass out of the wideness that seems into the wideness that is; and the way into that real wideness lies through much that is narrow and hard—much that hinders the feet and chafes the spirit.

'Thou hast set my feet in a large room.' The writer of those words had left his childhood far behind him. He had entered into manhood's inheritance of duty and responsibility. He had been many a time over-caught in the coil of adverse circumstance; he had sorrowed and suffered and sinned; he had faced temptation and found bitter proof of his own weakness; he had faced the many-sided and intricate problem of existence; he knew something of the inevitable and the unalterable,—and yet, calmly mindful of all this, his verdict upon

existence was this: 'Thou hast set my feet in a large room.'

After having seen the sordidness and meanness and littleness of things, David still held that life is a grand, free, glorious gift—that it is liberty and opportunity and hope. What was the secret of his wide and worthy view of life? How had he escaped these narrower and meaner thoughts that crowd into men's minds and belittle their lives? He had laid hold upon God. He looked at life through the divine purpose. He found the high and noble meaning of the dusty parable that men call the day's work. When he talks of life as a large room, it is really his way of saying, 'Thy service is perfect freedom.' If life is lived to God, then it is wider than any man can measure. We look at life as it comes day after day with the same duties and difficulties and needs; we face the little cares and vexations that are never long absent from any one's experience; and life becomes mechanical, monotonous, insignificant. We conclude that life is dull and cramped and narrowed down; and whether we express it in words or no, the thought of our heart is this, 'Thou hast set my feet in a small room.' And we come to that conclusion because we have missed the very purpose for which God has set us where He has set us, and made us what we are. If you think you are here in this world to make a

name for yourself that shall be in other men's lips; if you think the chief end of your being is that you should enjoy yourself; then your measurements of this room of life are about accurate. But supposing you admit you are here to grow a soul—supposing you discover that there is a spiritual and eternal significance in every detail of the day's life: what then? I think you will be led to the conclusion that you are living in a room that God alone can measure, and you will find that the dimensions of life are infinite. If you are bent on what you call good fortune, then very likely life is a meagre and contemptible chance; but if your heart is set on a good character, then opportunity assumes boundless proportions. Life is a pitiably small room for the people who do not know why they are here at all; or who, knowing something of life's highest purposes and ends, deliberately seek something lower than the highest and less than the best. If your shop is only a place for merchandise; if your kitchen has nothing more than a domestic significance; then I confess life is a very small affair, and it is a great question whether it is really worth while going on with it at all. But God means you to get beyond the brief moment and the earthly means, into the vast eternal reason for existence. Buying and selling are small things; but honesty is a very great thing. There is nothing very

significant or impressive about the household work; but patience and kindliness, and service of one another are great, deathless things. The pains that our bodies suffer, the fret and jar of circumstance and all life's common necessities, are small things in themselves; but the courage and sympathy and self-control and unselfishness that in the purpose of God are to grow out of these things, are great with a greatness we cannot at present estimate. The things that we call hindrances are, if we but knew it, spacious opportunities for brave and worthy living. If a man is bent on serving himself and his desire, then very often the day's life becomes to him a prison-house from which there is no escape; but if he be bent on serving the God above him, then in his most hard-pressed moments he shall taste the liberty of obedience, and in his most straitened circumstance he shall breathe the ampler air in which it is given unto every faithful heart to dwell. Life is a small room for the man who tries to please himself, but it is a very large room for the man who is willing to deny himself. If love, and faith, and toil, and prayer, and patience, and a good conscience, and service of the brethren are the best things—the things that count and last—then I say the room of life is larger than many would have us believe, and holds for us more possibility than we shall ever fully realize and use. Never can we call

life narrow and cramped while there is 'room to deny ourselves,' to save our brethren, and to follow the Christ.

'Thou hast set my feet in a large room.' Sin, more than anything else, seems to take the meaning out of these words. There is the inherited weakness and the encircling contagion. Within us, the evil tendency; without us, the unhallowed opportunity. Sometimes a man accepts the pressing solicitation of evil, or yields to the hot-handed grip of the world's desire; and then with a demeaned dignity and lowered self-respect, he measures life and finds he has but a few square feet in which to stand and call himself a fool. Did I say he measures life? I withdraw that word. He measures his shame and his weakness,—his poor failure. But these are not life—they are only things that lead the way to it.

> For this is life: to love the light,
> To see the best, to ask for all;
> To seek a city out of sight,
> In spite of failure and of fall.

It is through the narrow winding ways of manifold temptation that a man enters into the splendid sweep of his own soul's liberty. We have to think of the things that are given to us in the fighting, and the things that wait us when the fight is fought. What happens to the man who resolutely takes his place in

the battle against sin—his own sin, the world's sin? Day by day the soul within him, that has its birth-place and its goal beyond the stars, asserts itself, as it discovers larger rights and possibilities, and an ever surer hope of victory gives vision not bounded by life's most pressing and persistent circumstance. Day by day it becomes more apparent that the life of the soul is circled by an horizon that its most daring dreams have never scanned, and that for the pure-hearted the dusty, choking, hand-to-hand encounter with sin holds promise wider than the world. My friend, if in this day of much striving you are growing sick and weary, let me remind you of the great end of it all. You are not fighting for the little patch of trampled earth beneath your feet—where the grass and the flowers have been beaten into common dust. You are fighting for the right and fitness to enter the Land that is very far off, where, by the river of nameless peace, men have life because they see God. Surely the life that finds room for a fight like that, is a wide life!

'Thou hast set my feet in a large room.' Those are the words of a man who has felt the force of his own immortality. He has found that on one side of this room of life there is no wall to limit and fold us. Life goes out into God's eternity. That is where God has fashioned it to go. Too often we find our eternity

in the calendar, and measure infinity by a foot-rule. We think there is nothing in this room of life that cannot be submitted to our chronology and our mensuration. 'Thou hast set my feet in a small room. I know it is small; I have measured it, I have sat in it and listened to the ticking of the seconds and the chiming of the hours.' O foolish one! You have only measured three sides of that room. You cannot measure the fourth side unless you can measure God.

We batter and bruise ourselves against the hard wall of life's stern necessities, its painful compulsions, its seemingly unheeding laws; and we deduce from our aching spirits a parable of life's narrowness. And yet, if we but recognized it, if we but trusted our hearts instead of our eyes, we should know that God is the soul's circumstance, and His infinitude is its breathing-space. 'Thou hast set my feet in a large room'—for Thou hast set me to live where I may find Thee, and serve Thee, and grow like unto Thee. I have Thy mercy to live by, Thy work to do, Thy heaven to win; and that is enough—for it is all.'

XX

Going in the Strength of the Lord

I will go in the strength of the Lord.—Ps. lxxi. 16.

THIS is one of the longest texts in the Bible. In its application it covers an indefinite period of time. The way to write this text is to put a few asterisks after the first three words, 'I will go.' Asterisks, as you know, are used in books to signify a lapse of time. They denote that there is a space of time—days, or it may be years—between the story that comes before them and the story that follows them. So, I say, we need asterisks in this text. There is sometimes a long stretch of years between 'I will go' and 'in the strength of the Lord.' There is often a lapse of time ere the first and last words of this verse meet, 'I' and 'the Lord.' Divinity is not always the first resource of humanity. Often it is its last resource. Men do not learn all at once to take God into their reckonings when they make their plans and forecast their endeavours. Some never learn that. And however the world may judge them, however it may con-

gratulate them and envy them, whatever the fashion of their earthly fortunes, they are the failures—the real and final failures; and the day comes when they know that this is so.

'I will go.' That is often the whole text in lips of inexperience. I speak to you who are so sure of yourselves. You with your youth and your untried strength, that is so much as you look at it, but that will prove to be so little when you come to spend it. At the beginning of life we look on our resources somewhat as the boy looks at his first half-sovereign. That little yellow coin is a perfect mint of money, till he comes to spend it, and very likely when it is gone he has precious little to show for it. It did not buy much. It just melted. So with life. Life comes to us as an inexhaustible inheritance—a limitless patrimony, and there be not a few, I fear, who at the end of the day have little left them but to wonder what has become of all they once had. So, I say, the words in the lips of youth are these: '"I will go." Do not talk to me about strength for the going. Am I not strong? Cannot I stand this journey of life? Of course I can. I feel able to go anywhere, climb any height, descend into any valley, cross the widest plain. I am not troubled about my ability to face the road. "I will go"—I must go. There are a thousand voices calling me in the world of men and things. There are so

many things I want to see—I will go and see them; so many things I want to gain—I will go and gain them; so many things I want to enjoy—I will go and enjoy them. I know I can.'

Oh the wild strong will of youth! Oh the omnipotence of those early determinations! Oh the finality of those early decisions! 'I will go in mine own strength. It is enough, and it will never fail me.' But oh, how tired the feet grow! and how far away the blue mountains ever are; and the journey grows greater and the pilgrim's strength less every day. And it may be there comes a day when the traveller can go no farther, all the strength of love and hope and enthusiasm expended. And there is nothing for it but despair or divinity. The soul finds God or it finds nothing. Life becomes a tragic failure or a triumph of faith. Sometime and somewhere in life a man has to learn the limits of self-help. He has to learn that nothing but heavenly strength can make life practicable. And the question of success or failure depends on whether he learns this lesson with the sun in the east and the day before him, or whether he learns it when the westering light casts long shadows on the way, telling him there are for him but a few more steps to take, and he must needs lean his worn and broken humanity on God if he is to take even them.

I do not say to you as you look within and forward that hope is not strong, that enthusiasm is not guerdoned with splendid energy, and that love is not grandly availing. I do not wish you to think lightly of life as God has given it to you. I would only remind you that there are weights of weakness, blows of temptation, and tempests of shame that are heavy and strong enough to break the wings of hope, and enthusiasm, and the very heart of love—for the life that is without God in the world.

But it may be that no one at the beginning of life can feel the full force of such thoughts as these. With the sense of unmeasured and inexhaustible power within, the promise of difficulty acts as a stimulus and a challenge rather than as a reason for a careful and thoughtful consideration of the situation. You may say to me, 'I know that life is neither easy nor safe. I know there are hindrances and risks and threats. That is part of my reason for going forth to meet it gaily and gladly. I would not thank you for a life with never a hill to breast, never a wrestle with the elements, never the chance of an ambushed foe.' Well, maybe such thoughts, such gallant and tingling anticipations, belong to life's early years. Maybe you cannot, standing straight and joyous in the morning light, lean on God as you will need to lean on Him ere the last long hill be

climbed, and the last cruel foe be slain; but it is much to feel Him near you, to find His presence in your worship, prayer, and faith, so that when the dangers that seem to-day beyond realization shall by-and-by be beyond escape you may be able to say, 'Thou art my strong refuge.'

But supposing that instead of thinking about the way itself, we begin to think about the end of the way. Instead of thinking about the difficulty of life, let us think about the destiny of life. 'I will go in mine own strength.' Yes, but where will you go? What is to be your destination? You may have health and skill to work, and the brain to think, and the heart to make many friends; and if the end of life were just to become a skilled workman, a clever student, or a social success,—why you might do that 'on your own.'

But when you come to understand, as I would that you might understand even here and now, that you are here in the world to make a saint, to find some of the meaning of the immortal ideas of beauty, truth, goodness, sacrifice, and to develop and cherish in your heart that love that loves for love's sake, unrepelled by ugliness, unchilled by indifference, undaunted by malice,—why then, I say, you are face to face with something that strikes through your self-confidence and drives home into your soul a sense of your insuf-

ficiency for life as it was meant to be lived. 'I will go.' Say no more than that if you are only going to the market to make the best of a few bargains, and to the social circle to get the good word of a few friends. But that is not life. That is not finding your destination; that is missing the way—and any one with neither genius nor industry can do that.

Beware of finding too easy an interpretation of life. If you were to study the Greek manuscripts from which we get the text of our New Testament you would sometimes find two different renderings of the same text. Now, whenever that happens, the student, amongst other things of course, has to remember this law of criticism, 'The more difficult reading is to be preferred.' I will tell you why. When a scribe was copying a portion of Scripture, say a passage from St. Paul, if he came to a word that he could not understand he was tempted now and again to substitute for it an easier word—something that made sense as he thought. He was never tempted to take a plain verse and put in a word that made its meaning hard and obscure. So the student has to remember that of two readings the harder one—the one that takes more understanding, more thinking out—is probably the older and truer one. So is it with life. It is the hard reading that is the true one. Jesus Christ has given that interpretation of life to us all. For ease,

He says, we must read discipline, for pleasure we must read duty, for man's desire we must read God's commandment, and for self-interest we must read sacrifice. And these words that Jesus has given us as the true reading of life reveal to us a path that no man can find and follow unless he has the Divine Friend at his side.

Now I would bid you look at life as He shows it to you. Look at the things that give meaning and value and immortality to life. People sometimes say to youth, 'The world is at your feet.' But that is not true unless heaven is in your heart. Look out beyond the brief ambitions, the trivial honours, the cheap victories, and the spurious gains of earth, and behold —oh, so far beyond them all!—the stainless light shining from the towers and pinnacles of the city of God. And know that if ever you are to come to the gates of that city, it must be by winning a victory compared with which every temporal achievement is but child's play. For the everlasting shelter and reward of that city are not for them whose hands are full, but for them whose hands are clean; not for them who have won honours, but for them who have learned humility; not for the successful, but for the unselfish; not for the clever, but for the faithful; not for them that have won the world as their prize, but for them that have overcome the world by the grace

of that eternal life Christ giveth unto them that trust and follow Him.

And we are here in this world to find that city, to obey the laws of it in our hearts every day, and to come to the glory of it at the end of the days. What shall we say, we who are foolish of thought, weak of will, and sinful of heart—'I will go'? No, that is not enough. It was enough when our destination was the market-place, but it will never take us to the city of God. We must turn to One who came to us here that we might go to Him there. We must ask for that strength that is folded in the forgiving love and renewing grace of God in Christ our Saviour. The Cross that stood at the end of His journey—the fulfilment of life—stands at the beginning of ours, the inspiration of life. And there we may learn to say, 'I will go in the strength of the Lord.'

XXI

Inspiration and Outlook [1]

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.—ACTS ii. 17.

And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.—REV. xxi. 2.

IN dealing with these passages let us be very practical. It would be easy to talk vaguely about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in human hearts bringing visions to the young and dreams to the old. The advantage of this method would be that somebody would be certain to be well satisfied with the discourse. Some people like teaching—if one may dignify it with that great name—that is a bit misty. It hangs round their minds for half-an-hour like a pleasing nimbus, and is so easily forgotten. Now, to keep well out of the zone of mist, I have set side by side with this great prophecy concerning the work of the Divine

[1] Preached at the Wesley Guild Conference, Aberystwyth, Whitsuntide 1906.

Spirit, a plain and historical example of that work; and I am going to preach to you not from the prophecy as an abstract doctrine of inspiration, nor from that great tidal wave of the new life that carried on its crest preacher and hearers what time the new age was ushered in; but from this one definite illustration of what the Holy Spirit did in the heart of a man—of how it taught him to look out upon the future of humanity.

We might call our subject the Holy Spirit and the human outlook. 'I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.' That was the vision of the Spirit. Let us accept it as it is given to us. Let us not try to spiritualize it. It is quite spiritual enough. Our business is to try to understand it. Sometimes when we think we are spiritualizing a thing we are really vapourizing it, and there is our mist again.

Let us take it that this man who tells us he was in the Spirit saw the holy city coming down from God; as radiant and beautiful as a bride adorned for her husband. Some men look up and behold the face of silence, and the plains of peace, and the glory of the stars. And such a vision is worth something to the life that sees it. But here is a man who was in the Spirit, a man who had some share in the precious mystery of the awakened and renewed heart, and

when he looked up he saw not the light of the stars —but the light of a city. My friends, divine inspiration is not only the greatest fact in life, but it is also the most practical. It brings us near to God, but also near to life. What does the city stand for? It stands for human life with all its possibilities, its problems, and its pains. It stands for humanity in all its relationships—all its inner forces and all its outward forms. It stands for men and women, loving, toiling, hoping, sorrowing, suffering, sinning.

Oh the message of the city and the need of it! There is no mistaking it—there is no getting away from it. It is no dream. It is naked and aggressive reality. Whatever a city meant to St. John, we know what it means to-day in our modern world. Many of us here have come from one or other of the great industrial centres. It is not too much to suppose that we all know something about the existing conditions of town life. The mention of the city makes us think of dark courts, houses in which our brothers and sisters ought never to live, the flaring yellow lights of the public-houses, men and women whom poverty and sin have reft of all the joy of living, and who steer their lives by these flaring yellow lights, little children with disease in their bones and unveiled sin before their young eyes every day, a group of little fellows on the pavement with their heads clustered together

over a washy sporting paper—and all the abominations and shames and pathos that Ruskin calls 'the darkness of the terrible streets.' I know as well as you do that that is not all. There is many a sweet and beautiful thing in the city. How could it be otherwise? If there is any truth in the great thought that lies at the heart of this festival of the Christian year—then the 'Spirit of the Lord is in the midst of the city.' But, for all that, take it all in all, a great city is the saddest place on God's earth; and the sadness and the sin that are found *there* are found in proportionate measure in all the places, even the seeming peaceful hamlets, where men dwell and work. 'I, John, saw the holy city coming down from God out of heaven.' The more you think of it the less you will wonder at this vision of St. John. When he says he saw, as he did once see, harpers, and palm-bearers and processions of angels and archangels, we may be forgiven for saying to him—'Well, and what of that?' But he saw a holy city, a city whose joys were clean joys, whose pleasures were pure pleasures, whose gains were honest gains, whose service was perfect freedom—a city whose citizens walked and worked in the light of God's face. Is not that what you and I say we want to see? Is it not what we ought to see? Nay, I will go further and ask is it not what—if we are in the Spirit—we shall see? A holy city. I

don't mean by-and-by when God calls us to Himself. I mean here and now. St. John was not in heaven when he had his vision, he was—where God grant this day's worship may bring us all—in the Spirit.

St. John called the city New Jerusalem. I can find it in my heart to be almost sorry that he named it. It shows his vision was practical; but it has helped to make our vision vague and remote. When St. John spoke of the New Jerusalem, do you think he had completely forgotten 'the old Jerusalem? Don't you think he thought it was time that they had a new city? Don't you think his vision taught him it could be made new? By what authority, pray, have we translated this expression New Jerusalem by that vague word heaven? It is all wrong. For the last three years I have been calling it Birmingham. My friends, we shall do no good in the world, until under the practical dominance of the Divine Spirit we come to know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the holy city is not something to be longed for in the heavens of God, but something to be builded in the earth which is His also. We have sat and sung, 'Oh what must it be to be there,' but that chorus does not hold the high-water mark of the spirit-filled life. That life at its best is not the life of a singer—it is the life of a builder. Let us not do what many people—and I am

afraid I must say specially young people—are doing, and that is, think that the truest expression of the spirit-filled life is in the lilt of popular mission song. If you are in the Spirit and if the Spirit is in you, renewing your mind and cleansing your heart, you will find the question, 'What must it be to be there?' very secondary to this question, 'What will it be like if only we can make here as beautiful as there?'

That is the work of the Spirit. We are not to be singers of 'glory songs,' we are to be builders of the city of God in the earth.

'I saw the holy city coming down from God out of heaven.' Perhaps we have been too much concerned with where the Holy Spirit can lift us to and prepare us for, to see as we should the vision of what that Spirit has for us to do here and now. We are very anxious that earth should go to heaven; we do not always realize that the great purpose that God the Spirit is to accomplish is just the opposite. He is to bring heaven to earth. He is to make heaven in our lives. Let us not think of heaven as a kind of glorified suburb of earth to which the spiritually successful may hope some day to retire and find a bit of quiet. I should be sorry to think of a heaven like that, and should have positively no desire to go to it. Heaven is just what God is trying to make

earth. Every city is meant to be a heavenly city. Call to mind those grand words of Zechariah that we read together just now, about God dwelling in the city—a real earthly city, mind you, with its old folk leaning on their staves, and its little children playing in the street—and making it a city of truth. That is what God is doing. Never a day passes in the cities of men in which this great miracle of the Spirit does not take place. It is a continuous miracle. Call it what you like—renewal, regeneration, the new life, the baptism of the Spirit—call it all these things, it is the holy city with its light and law and love coming down into the hearts of the children of men. And you see what that means. It means another absolutely honest man in the market-place, another light-filled life in the workshop, another man with the sin of the city under his feet, another breath of prayer and reverence and godliness going forth to sweeten the life of the factory, the school, the home, the study, and the street. This is the fruit of the Spirit.

This is not all. There is a fathomless mystical story of the Spirit that no man can tell. There is all the infinite grace and mystery that must belong to the life of God living itself out through the mind and heart and character of them that trust Him. There are anointings for special work, and baptisms of knowledge and power for individual souls. But all these

things issue in the fact that the Spirit of God in our hearts will first of all and always make us look for the holy city and work for it. It will make us bold to claim here and now all that belongs to it. 'There shall be no night there.' Why wait for heaven to interpret that for you? Is not the night the parable of all dark and evil things? No night there; then no night here—no slum, no drunkard, no gambler, no thief, no pauper, no libertine. That is not the final ideal for the age of the Spirit, but if you try to live up to that in your prayer and faith and toil, you will, I think, be busy for some time to come, and you will be well employed.

Oh this city, this new and glorious city coming down from God out of heaven! How can we see it? How can the light of its towers, and the delight of all its pleasant places, and the beauty of its life and the sweetness of its laws,—I say how can these things kindle our imagination and fill us with enthusiasm and devotion if we never see them? And this is the vision for them that are in the Spirit.

This brings us, where every study of religion or of life brings us, face to face with a personal question. All religion is personal religion. We may talk of the family or the city or the nation or the human race—but these are only terms in which we think of a larger or smaller number of individuals. No matter how

big and wide the truth you are thinking about, think about it long enough and honestly enough, and you will find yourself alone with it in the chamber of your heart. Only the holy heart can see the holy city. We have but one tiny window through which to get our view of life, and everything depends on whether that window be clean. And let us follow this thought a step farther. The holy city can only come through the holy citizen. That which is to be the light and law of the city must first be the light and law of the house. I mean the house of life. The coming of the holy city may be discussed in the larger councils of men—it can only be decided on each man's own threshold and in each man's own heart. How stands it, then, with you, my friend?

Here on this great Festival Day of the Spirit—and in every day that dawns and dies—it is yours to accept or reject the grace of the Holy Spirit offered to your heart; and so, doing the one or the other as you must, you hasten or retard the building of the holy city in the life of the world.

XXII

True Imperialism

The shadow of Egypt.—ISA. xxx. 2.

MANY of the changes that time brings are on the surface of life. There is a certain stability at the heart of things. The great laws of life change not. The selfsame sunlight that put an end to Jacob's conflict with the angel gilds our joys and guides our toils to-day. So is it with these human hearts of ours. So is it with the great common sentiments and necessities. Motives that swayed men's lives when the world was young can be traced in modern life. Life changes its costume more easily than it changes its character. When we say that history repeats itself, we do not mean that there are occasional coincidences ; we mean rather that the best and the worst in human life have a tendency to perpetuate themselves, and that through all the ages the human heart beats to the same tune, cherishes some of the same nobilities and the same follies, and shows

itself capable of much that is fine and much that is contemptible.

So we may go back through very many centuries and find in a bit of ancient history that which is repeating itself in the life of to-day. The national question among the Jews of Hezekiah's day was, How can we shake off the Assyrian yoke? And the popular solution of the problem was, Enter into an alliance with Egypt. True, Egypt was a land of many idols, but it was also a land of many horses and chariots, and full coffers. And there have always been those in the world who, when they have wanted chariots, have not been over particular where they borrowed them. There have always been those who would fraternize with an idolater—provided he was a rich idolater. Egypt was powerful with that kind of power that the world and the devil can fully appreciate. There is a might that calls to the world in the clang of iron and the thunder of horsemen and the clink of gold, and many there be that trust in it. There is a might that lifts not up its voice in the clamour of the world, but that pleads its rights and its power in the silences of thought, in the quiet inner place where conscience dwells, in the depths of all true feeling, and on the lonely heights of the ideal—and would to God that you and I had more faith in it.

The choice between these two is ever before us. Since the days of Hezekiah, kingdoms have risen to greatness and sunk into oblivion. The great centres of power and industry, of learning and dominion, have shifted steadily westward. Places that once pulsated with industrial activity and political influence have now little more than an archaeological significance. But the heart of the West to-day is as the heart of the East in many a dim yesterday, and the thing against which the Jewish prophet protested is the thing against which some one must protest still—even trust in the shadow of Egypt. Recall for a moment the stately and spiritual interest of a song that Israel sang in the days of a purer and more reverent national life. 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee.' Then the shadow of Egypt fell on the people. They transferred their allegiance, not deliberately, but none the less really, from the unseen to the seen. The great changes of life, and especially those for the worse, are often undeliberate.

Now I want you to think for a moment about our own dear country—this England of ours we love so well. Of recent years a great word has been upon

our lips, and that word is Imperialism. And it is a noble and worthy word. It stands for something that finds room for the expansive and unselfish powers of a great people. But there are things associated with this thing as men name it and think of it and seek it to-day, that lack nobility and pure worth. As I hear it there is too much thunder in it. It is too suggestive of chariots and horsemen and the strength of iron and the worth of gold. The shadow of Egypt is upon it. If we are to save this great word Empire from belittlement and abuse, if we are to keep the dignity of it intact and the glory of it unstained, if we are to save it from becoming the catchword of politicians or a high-sounding name for greedy commercialism, we must take it out of the shadow of Egypt, where great things lose their greatness and noble things their nobility, and we must let the shadow of the Almighty fall upon it. The true Imperialism is to be realized and safeguarded not by those who are looking for a wider frontier—but by those who are seeking a higher faith. Whenever an Empire has been threatened, the first whisper of that threat has always been heard in the streets of its own cities. The peril of a nation, as the peril of a soul, is ever within and not without. Read your Gibbon, and you shall catch the first warning of Rome's ruin not in the growls of the Goths whose heroes came up against her,

but in the feasting and the boasting and rioting of that vicious capital and of all the cities of that Empire. The things that threaten national prestige and power, even as the things that make them, are found in the heart of the people. I for one believe that the day is not far distant when he alone will be hailed as an Imperialist who thinks more of his country's obligations than of its rights, more of its debts than its dues, more of the grave and holy responsibility of power possessed than of the acquisition of more. We shall come to see that a man cannot think imperially unless he thinks unselfishly. The safety and the sovereignty of England has never been in the sole keeping of the diplomat, the general, and the admiral. It has ever been, and will ever be in all who stand for the Empire of the Christ, who know that the foundations of true dominion are not dug with the sword, that a nation is great not by the sweep of its territory but by the justice and mercy of its rule, that national wealth is not a thing of square miles and golden millions but of godliness, truth, and love—of power to see and fitness to serve the high abiding spiritual interests of our common humanity.

God has given to our Island Race the spirit of enterprise and adventure. England's sons fare forth into all the world—her ships are in all ports, by colonial and commercial activity she has lines of

influence going out into all the earth. The story of how all this has come to pass—the story of England's admirals and soldiers and statesmen, her thinkers and teachers and her sons of toil—is a splendid story. But what is to be the next chapter in that story? Other great powers have climbed side by side with us, sharers in the same civilization, and, in some cases, in the same faith. Materialism sometimes suggests to us the possibility of an Armageddon, an awful physical struggle of the European powers. But the thing that is coming, yea, has already come, is a different kind of fight. It is a spiritual Armageddon. The shadow of Egypt will be no protection in this fight. We must carry our ideas, our policy, our patriotism, our earthly service, out of the shadow of Egypt into that other shadow where men find God—His will and His grace. For the last arbitrament of life is always divine, and the higher stages of all world-struggles are determined by the cleanness or uncleanness of the souls of them that strive. It is the work of the Christian Church to fashion within its borders and to send forth into the world the ideal patriot, the man who can enter with warm and passionate enthusiasm into the service of his country, bringing into that service the pure ideal and unselfish ministry of the kingdom of the selfless King.

And now let us try to bring all this home to our own hearts. The difference between the nation and the individual is mainly a quantitative one. If the national confidence is in the shadow of Egypt, it is because the individual confidence is there. The shadow of an earthly ideal, an unspiritual interpretation of life, a material estimate of success, has fallen on our separate souls. No wonder that men miss the divinity of history, and leave God out of their widest reckonings and their corporate counsels, when they fail to find them in their toil for bread, and, reversing the word of Scripture, say, 'We walk by sight and not by faith.'

My friends, the first debt that you and I owe to our country must be paid to our God. The highest service that any man can render to the Fatherland is the service of faith. To dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty; to lay up treasure in heaven; to be reverent and prayerful and unselfish; to lean on God amid the simple toils and necessities and pains of one's daily life; to manifest the heroism that passes unrecognized among men because it is heroism, and, therefore, clothed in humility; to be less worldly than you are often tempted to be; to believe in the deathless divinity of conscience, duty, and love,—this is the higher patriotism, into whose hands at last the

honour and the peace of any people must be placed for safe keeping.

There is a vision that some can see already, and that maybe all shall see some day. It comes to the hearts of men from the village of Nazareth, from one who was the King of men because He could love more and suffer more and help more than any one else. It is a vision of Empire not territorial, for He said, 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth'; not martial, for He said, 'Put up thy sword.' It is moral. It is the vision of the human brotherhood ever being more largely understood and more fully realized among men. Oh for the unworldly dream of that other kingdom—the Empire of the Christ!

Something kindlier, higher, holier,
All for each and each for all.
Earth at last a warless world,
A single race, a single tongue.

Every tiger madness muzzled,
Every serpent passion killed,
Every grim ravine a garden,
Every blazing desert tilled.

Robed in universal harvest,
Up to either pole she smiles;
Universal ocean softly
Washing all her warless isles.

My friends, live for that day. The more you live for it, the sooner the world shall see it. Find your ideal in the Shadow of the Almighty. This is the highest service of the Fatherland. This is the patriotism that lives on to bless, though the patriot himself passes away. This is the deathless imperialism of godliness.

XXIII

The Hireling Shepherd

He that is an hireling.—JOHN x. 12.

WHEN Jesus used an allegory, He always chose one that would have an enduring significance —one that would not only appeal forcefully to those to whom He was speaking, but that would have nothing in the form of it to prevent it from yielding up its meaning easily and completely to reverent seekers after truth through all time. The simple figure of shepherding, into which Jesus wove some of His most mystical, as well as some of His most practical, teaching, speaks to us all. True, there are some beautiful shades of meaning in the figure that only appear when it is placed in its original Oriental setting; but, quite apart from that, the figure of the Good Shepherd, under which Jesus spoke of Himself, has ever brought wondrous comfort to the heart of the Christian Church. The Eastern and Western mind alike have loved to read the message of God's protecting and

redeeming love in this divine pastoral. To the sunny heart of a little child and the world-weary heart of a sinner there is no more winning picture to be found than that of the Shepherd of Souls, who lived and died for His sheep.

As we read this tender allegory, the Good Shepherd passes before our eyes, a gracious, well-loved, reassuring figure. All about Him there is an atmosphere that induces confidence. A sense of security pervades the story. The bond between Him and His flock is high and perfect. He knows their names. They know His voice; they recognize its tones; they cannot be deceived. And whether they are biding in the fold or being put forth to pasture, it is enough for them to know that He is near. By-and-by a stranger comes. He calls to the sheep, but no ill comes of his calling. It falls on unresponsive ears. It means nothing to the sheep, for they know not the voice of strangers. Presently a darker shadow than that of the stranger falls on the story. It is the slouching, malign figure of a thief 'come that he may steal and kill and destroy.' Here the unresponsiveness of innocence will avail the sheep nothing. Innocence may deliver the soul from the crafty, but not from the cruel. For a moment we tremble. But listen, the Shepherd speaks: 'I am come that they may have life, and may have it more

abundantly. The Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep.' All is well. We have no fear of that cruel figure crouching in the shadow of the sheepfold wall, hate in his eyes and a weapon in his hand. The peace of the story deepens. The thief is as powerless as the stranger. That is the story of Christ's love for His own—a story that is woven into all the years. Age after age the sophistries and cruelties of the world that knows not God have beset the flock of Jesus; and all to no purpose save to make this plain, that craft and violence alike are vain whilst that Love that is unto death keeps watch about the fold.

But I think that whilst we read in this rich allegory of the Good Shepherd the message of God's love for men, and His nearness to them in their needs and perils, we fail to see that there is another message that concerns not only our needs in the sight of God, but our duties among our fellows. There is only one Good Shepherd, and we are His sheep. That figure relates to our individual lives, or to the corporate life of the Church, as dependent upon God in Jesus Christ. But what about our relationship to others? What about our place in the world? What about deep human need, not as we experience it, but as we have to try to meet it? The pastoral figure speaks to us not only of personal satisfaction, but of personal

responsibility. The staff of our pilgrimage is fashioned strangely like a shepherd's crook. We all have partly in our keeping some of the fair and precious things in other souls. We are called to be humble brothers, lowly servants of the Good Shepherd. We have to keep watch and ward among the sheepfolds. And surely Jesus Himself meant that we should find in this great allegory that which should teach us not only where to place our faith, but also how to do our work. Surely He meant us to find that ideal of sympathy and personal devotion, of vigilance, courage, and sacrifice, in the power of which alone we can hope to serve our needy brethren.

If we are in danger of missing this aspect of His pastoral figure, the words about the hireling shepherd most forcibly bring it before our minds and home to our hearts. This shameful picture of a shepherd leaving his flock to the mercy of the wild beasts could have had no place in the allegory if Jesus had not been speaking of our service of the world, as well as His. Not even by way of contrast is that wretched coward admissible if we are to think only of the Good Shepherd's own personal work. But reading, as I feel we must read, the law and fashion of our own service in that of the Shepherd Himself, allowing, of course, for all that sets the Eternal Christ for ever above and beyond us in the service of man,

the figure of the hireling brings home some deep and searching truths to our hearts.

The picture of the hireling shepherd is introduced just when the allegory has reached its highest point of thought and uttered its noblest message: 'The Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep.' That is the last heroism of faithfulness, the final seal of sacrifice; the unutterable, convincing tragedy of love. Suddenly our gaze is turned to another scene.

Still we are among the sheepfolds. Still a shepherd is keeping watch. And lo! a gaunt and hungry wolf leaps into the flock before their shepherd's eyes. And in a moment the shepherd drops his heavy staff, wraps his long outer garment about his waist, and flees for his life. And the wolf has its cruel will of the deserted sheep. Surely Jesus set this shameful picture of the coward shepherd fleeing like the wind with the snarl of the wolf in his ears just where He did set it—against a fair background of courage, love, and sacrifice—to warn us against unfaithfulness in life's high task, and to teach us what manner of men we must be if we are to do that task as it should be done.

'The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling.' How those words get brought down through our work into our character! How they search the hidden springs of action in human life! And we do not

submit willingly to the searching. We are prone to believe that there is a good deal of chance work in life, and that much that we say and do (chiefly, be it said, our least creditable words and deeds) has but a very slight and casual relation to what we really are. How often men salve their consciences for something not quite true in speech, or just in action, by assuring themselves that after all they are in the main truthful and just in character! How they silence the judgement of conscience on their evil ways by singing the praises of their good disposition! And this is a perilous and even disastrous way of making life's reckonings. Of course, conduct is never a literal transcript of thought, or an exact equivalent of intention. Taking life moment by moment, and judging it deed by deed, it is often easy to find some small discrepancy between the inner and the outer fact. Being is always a larger and more complicated thing than doing. But if we let this thought enter into moral calculations and affect our self-criticism, we must remember that it cuts both ways. If we are sometimes better than our good deeds, we are quite as often worse than our bad deeds. But it is our wisdom to abandon this method of calculation, not because it cannot comfort us, but because it can confuse us. It may hide from us the fact that there is a real and vital relation between what we really are and

what we do. We come far short of our ideal, but we never get very far from the level of our character. Character may be itself lifted and purified and ennobled. That is the miracle of grace. But character, be it good or bad, is the determining force of action. That is the law of service. And to acknowledge this is vital to that profound moral and spiritual amendment that is the secret of all good works.

'The hireling flecth because he is an hireling.' But that is too often the last reason he gives to himself or to any one else for his flight, and so he goes on being a hireling. His explanation of his action is that he was taken by surprise, or that he was tired (forgetting, by the by, that he was not too tired to run), or that he had not a reliable weapon in his hand, or that he went to seek help. The only thing he will not say is that he ran away because he is a poor, mean-spirited fellow, who tries to get as much as he can out of life, and to give as little as possible in exchange for it. My friends, I do not want to discourage you, nor myself, in this life of ours, where almost every day records something discreditable and disappointing. But I do say that as we read these records we must be ready to forgo the false comfort of an excuse. There is one precious thing hidden for a God-seeking soul in his most shameful failure, and that is the shame of it. And that can only come and do its work as a man

dares in the light of truth and by the grace of God to say in that evil hour, that sinful moment, 'There is not only a combination of difficult circumstances, a surprise, a snare, an ambuscade of the devil, there is something of what I am, and ought not to be.' That confession is an essential part of our deliverance. It is the secret of a better life to-morrow. The hireling is an hireling till the day he dares to take into his soul the bitter shame of calling himself one. And in that very confession he becomes something better than the thing he has confessed himself to be.

Perhaps a word or two may be permitted concerning the suddenness of this man's temptation. I think that Jesus meant us to find some emphatic significance in this feature of the story. He was dealing with a man's basal and continual relationship to his God-given task. The hireling in the allegory might have said that it was hardly fair to judge him by one weak moment. He had looked after the flock fairly well; he had counted them morning and evening, led them to pasturage, and kept them from straying. Was this all to be forgotten in one flight from duty? The wolf came so suddenly. He had no time to collect himself. He found himself taking to his heels, and, once on the run, he could not stop. In justice to this shamed man, in justice to the pure and dreadful truth, how much is there in this plea?

Very little when you come to look into things. And here, again, I do not want to say a word of discouragement. But let us be willing to face things as they are. That is the secret of abiding encouragement. It is in the surprises of life that we reap the reward of character. Honour and dishonour are not sprung upon us. In the whirl of things we seize that which we have learned most to value, and hold that which we have made ourselves strong enough to keep. Whatever is snatched from us, some of the explanation of the loss lies in our own fingers. The spontaneous things in life have the longest history. The thing that responds to the spur of the moment is the habit of the years. Half the value of character-building would be swept away if it were not a fact that a man is gloriously or shamefully himself in the moment when he must act without deliberation. What he does in that moment is the real resultant of his character, though it may give the lie to his ideal. Mind you, I say 'morally.' Good men make mistakes. A man suddenly called upon to act may do the wrong thing, and yet do his duty. The saints make mistakes. A brave shepherd may make a tactical error, but only a hireling runs away from a wolf. We talk about a man rising to an occasion, but in the last deep truth of things that is a shallow and misleading phrase. No man ever rose to an

occasion. If he meets the great occasion and deals with it as it should be dealt with, it is because he is living all the while on the level of that occasion. The most that the largest occasion can do for us is to give us an opportunity of being what we are. It cannot by the magic of its swift demands make us in a moment what we ought or ought not to be.

But let us turn from the question of the vital basal place that character holds in all service to the question of what kind of a character is essential to the best service. This question becomes really very simple when we get back to the Good Shepherd and to the thought of ourselves as being called in somewise to follow Him in the daily pastorate of sympathy and of service. Love is at once the germ and the spirit of it. The hireling is contrasted with the Good Shepherd in that the bond between the hireling and his work was a bond of selfishness and not a bond of love. The hireling works simply for wages. He is the picture for all time of the utter incompetence of selfishness to perform the great task of life. No ideal lends one glint of glory to the hireling's work. No enthusiasm makes it throb with sweet strong life. No hidden springs of sacrifice make the doing of it of some lasting worth to the toiler himself, or to the world in which his toil lies. And, worst of all, in the thing hardest to do and most worth doing, amid

the precious pains and perils when it would so often seem God bids us find life's most precious opportunities, the hireling—the man with the inadequate motive—fails his trust and his Master, and flees for his life, not knowing that in that flight every step is taking him farther away from the few things worth saving—the price of his conscience, the cleanness of his soul, the power to look in the face of the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

We have, each of us, a place in the service of the Good Shepherd and the folds where there are so many hungry mouths to feed, so many weak souls to protect, and out in the wilderness of sorrow and sin where so many foolish and weary ones are straying. Some of us have been called to the Christian ministry, and so 'to tend the flock of God.' Pray for us, as we pray for ourselves, that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested we may not be ashamed and confounded. Some of us have charge of the lambs of the flock—a charge that seems sometimes too delicate and gracious a task for any but the Good Shepherd Himself. Most of us have in our partial keeping the peace and happiness and spiritual safety of a little circle we meet at hearth and board. Each of us has a place and a trust in this great pastorate of life. How shall we fill it? How not fail in it? How shall we glorify its

drudgeries and meet its great occasions? Whence the courage and good cheer, the patience, tenderness, and hopefulness for all these things?

The answer to these questions is not far to seek. It is here. 'I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep.' The symbol of our service may be the Shepherd's crook, but the secret of our service is the Saviour's cross. It is only by the grace of an ever-deepening communion with the eternal love of God made manifest in Christ that the hireling spirit in its most subtle forms and deep disguises can be tracked down in the inmost recesses of our nature and driven forth from the smallest details of our service. Duty and honour and natural affection, and social instincts and generous ideals, will help us much; but no man may be sure that he will not some day prove himself an hireling spirit unless for him the cup of life has become the cup of a sacrament, even, to use the great words of St. Ignatius, 'the blood of Christ, which is immortal love.'

XXIV

The Wilderness and the Sunrise

And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ije-Abarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, towards the sunrising.—NUM. XXI. 11.

LET us get away from the geography of this passage. When we have done that the passage reads like this. 'They journeyed . . . in the wilderness . . . towards the sunrising.' That is no longer simply the story of an ancient nomadic people. It is an epitome of life in God's hands. It is the divinity of existence. It is a parable of providence and grace. It would be easy to show how this reading of our text is illustrated in the story of Israel. But I propose frankly to look at it in the light of Christ. The teaching of Jesus is full of the tremulous light of the dawn. It was a dawn-gospel that He preached. It was the coming day that He heralded. The true Christian theology is ever flushed with the sunrise.

We often speak of Christ's hopefulness in dealing with men and women. But that hopefulness was rooted in something deeper and wider than the

individual. Jesus recognized that all the great positive forces of life make for the light. Jesus found a reason for optimism in the very nature of things—in the very make of the universe. Life, in as far as it fulfils itself according to the divine purpose, moves sunward. Jesus had a keen sense of the direction in which life was meant to travel. He knew the great forces that make for darkness and confusion and pain, but they are not the greatest and the deepest and the most enduring forces in life. Jesus never treated sin as an assertion. He always regarded it—in its most assertive forms—as a negation, a contradiction of the solemn, perfect words spoken by the Creator of life before sin was, and by which He will abide when sin is no more. Jesus knew more about the sinfulness of the world than any one else could ever know, and yet He never seemed to be expecting to find sin in men's hearts. He was always looking for something good. He never by His words or His attitude regarded sin as inevitable. In all His relation to human life Jesus never lost sight of that which was meant to be, that in the human heart which responded to Him and His gospel. Above the fact that a man has yielded to evil He placed the fact that a man can respond to good. He did honour to man as he exists in the holy and positive purpose of the Divine Creator.

As we look at the world through Christ's eyes, we see that sin is not a purpose, it is the frustration of a purpose. Sin is not a law, it is the violation of a law; it is an attempt to interrupt the continuous principle of good, and the principle is older and stronger and nearer to life than the interruption. Strictly speaking, sin is not the rule; it is the exception. The exception may seem to be greater than the rule. Perhaps in its present results, as we tabulate them, it is greater. But it is at the best only a quantitative greatness. Good is the divine rule of life and its essential and vital law. Sin is a stumbling-block in the way of the soul's destiny. It may thwart that destiny and bring it to nought, but it cannot take its place as the positive rule of life. The gospel of Jesus teaches us that sin is not destiny. It is not, and cannot be, the great life direction of the world. Mind you, Jesus did not teach a gospel of ease, a policy of drift, an automatic salvation, an unfounded and hazy optimism, unable to give any account of itself. He taught that all personal issues of life are folded in personal character and conduct, in the heart's faith or unfaith, in the soul's purity or impurity. But looking beyond the question of individual destiny, Jesus taught that, whether we greet that light with gladness or shamefastness, it will come —this sunrise judgement, this victory of good, this

divine conquest over all the darkness and shadows of the world.

And this view of human destiny is the one thing that can produce in every man the right temper for a successful battle with sin and sorrow. Apart from Jesus Christ men are apt to put a full stop at this word wilderness—and one is not wholly surprised at that punctuation. 'They journeyed in the wilderness.' For some that tells the whole story of life. They underline the word wilderness. They sigh the word out. They linger over it with the morbid dalliance of those who feel shut up to believing the worst about themselves and their fellow men and the world. They become under its influence epicures in sadness. People who are always painting studies in grey, people who forget the fine days but keep a careful account of the rainfall, not knowing that rain is as precious as sunshine,—these are the pessimists ; and if you would find out whether or no they really deserve the name, set them to read this text, 'And they journeyed in the wilderness toward the sunrising.' Not one of them can read it. 'And they journeyed in the wilderness.' They get that far, and there they stick. They cannot get past this word wilderness. With them it is a final word ; it is the summing-up of things ; it is life epitomized. So it is a great word, and always has been, in the vocabulary of

the pessimists. They emphasize it. They repeat it. They adorn it with unwholesome adjectives. They call it a waste, howling wilderness. There is no beauty and there is even no quietness. It is a wilderness bereft of those few dubious advantages which even such a region is usually supposed to possess. 'This wilderness.' That is their text when they preach, their promise when they prophesy, and their memory when they look back.

Now to all these people whose spirits are tinged or stained with pessimism—the gloomy-minded, the low-spirited, the dissatisfied, the shamefast, the toil-broken, the sin-broken—the gospel of Jesus applies one great healing and saving principle; it adds something to their motto; it finishes this text for them; it says, You journey in the wilderness—yes, that is beyond dispute—but toward the sunrising. Jesus offers to the whole world a gospel with the sunrise in it. He offers it to the individual. Pessimism has a moral basis—a moral cause. There is a simple solution of life which, like other beautiful and precious things, is far too simple for the preacher as a rule to dare to offer it to an enlightened and critical modern congregation, and it is this, 'Be good and you will be happy.' There is the philosophy of the gospel in that trite exhortation. Jesus turns a man's face to the light, the love-light, the truth-light, the

hope-light, and all in the man's soul that has any kinship with light and any power of response to it begins to send out little feelers toward the sun ; and that man finds that, looking eastward, the wilderness loses its grey and grim aspect, and walking in the light of Jesus—the light of faith and worship, of companionship and communion with the true sources of his being—he comes to the place where the wilderness doth rejoice and blossom as the rose. He finds in the wilderness grateful shade as of Lebanon, and vision as far and glorious as from the peak of Carmel by the sea. 'The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon.'

'Through the wilderness,' with its waste places and its wild beasts. Yes, we must grant that. We must all go a long way with the pessimist as he describes the foolish, passionate, fevered, ill-regulated, lawless life of humanity. But to every life that companies with Christ it is given to add, 'towards the sunrising.' Light and peace, wisdom and perfect government, the joy of obedience—the fulfilment of being—God Himself. That is, and ever must be, the great positive set of the current of life. To deny that is worse than pessimism ; it is atheism.

But further, as there is a pessimism of sin, so also there is a pessimism of pain. 'Through the wilderness'—that is written on the itinerary of every soul.

That is part of every man's story. Some tread a path that seems to lie wholly in the wilderness—seems to pass through the heart of its loneliest and most desolate places; some only skirt it for a while, but all know something about it. It is a great problem. One could understand it if the wilderness experiences of life were strictly confined to those who might seem to have merited such a discipline—though in that case the wilderness would be a populous region; but so often it is the godly, the spiritually earnest, whose faces are turned towards the 'way that is desert.' But there is an explanation: for all these spirits the path of pain leads into the eye of the dawn.

It is a hard way, but it is not a blind way. The path is grievous, but the direction is good. As a little poem says—a poem written by a friend of mine to another friend in the days of his heart's need, the day when a great trouble had turned his face toward the wilderness way:

But One Traveller, old friend,
  Hath minished this way of its dread;
'Tis the shortest path in the end
  To heaven that a man can tread.

There are those, I know, who wept
  When first o'er its stones they went,
But 'twas Bethel whene'er they slept,
  And each waking divine content.

> And if in heaven I feel grief,
> I feel it may be for this :
> That not by the sorrowful way and brief
> God led my soul to His bliss.

'Towards the sunrising.' O my friends, whatever you do don't miss that. Don't let go of this Dawn-Gospel. The wilderness—life's inhospitable and unfruitful hours, the grey monotonies, the manifold ministries of disappointment and loneliness and sorrow—it is among these things that the path lies ; but it is to something wholly unlike these things that the path leads. Beyond the wilderness there is the sunrise-land, and maybe, as the poem says, the wilderness path is the shortest way thither.

And now to set before you once again the personal aspect of all this. I have spoken of the drift of things, of a world that is made to seek the light of the final victory of truth and beauty and peace, and of the unworldly hope born in the hearts of the sorrowful. I do not take a word of it back. I am fully persuaded that the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches the lifewardness of humanity. But this much must be said. Each man determines for himself whether he takes his place in the pilgrimage toward the light. 'They journeyed in the wilderness'—that is true of all men ; that is life as it must be. 'They journeyed towards the sunrising'—that is true of all

men as far as their possibilities and opportunities are concerned. But destiny is of our own deciding and fashioning. It shall be for each of us even as our faith or unbelief, our obedience or disobedience, our love or our selfishness shall determine. To lay the waste and sin of your life at the foot of Christ's Cross ; to lean on that infinite mercy manifested in Him—a mercy that remembers your needs and forgets your sin ; and to find in all your trouble God's message to your soul,—this is to journey in the wilderness, but toward the sunrising.

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